THE WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS;

WITH

HIS LIFE,

BY

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

"High Chief of Scottish song!
That could'st alternately impart
Wisdom and rapture in thy page;
And brand each vice with satire strong,
Whose lines are mottoes of the heart,
Whose truths electrify the sage."
CAMPBELL.

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PREFACE.

With something of hope and fear, I offer this work to my country. I have endeavoured to relate the chequered fortunes, delineate the character, and trace the works of the Illustrious Peasant with candour and accuracy: his farming speculations—excise schemes—political feelings and poetic musings are discussed with a fulness not common to biography: and his sharp lampoons and personal sallies are alluded to with all possible tenderness to the living and respect for the dead. In writing the Poet's life I have availed myself of his unpublished journals—private letters, manuscript verses, and of well-authenticated anecdotes and traits of character supplied by his friends; and I have arranged his works as much as might be in the order of their composition, and illustrated them with such notes, critical, historical and biographical, as seemed necessary. Of verse, one hundred and odd pieces will be found in this edition, more than Currie's octavo's contain. The number of letters, too, are materially increased—but nothing is admitted which bears not the true Burns stamp. The embellishments are of high merit: the portrait of the Poet has called forth the commendations of several who had the honour of his acquaintance; and the landscapes are from scenes made memorable by his muse.

A. C.

Belgrave-Place,
January 1, 1834.



THE LIFE OF

ROBERT BURNS.

PART I:—AYRSHIRE.

THE national poetry of Scotland, like her thistle, is the offspring of the soil. To the poems of our first James, the strains of forgotten minstrels, or the inspiration of shepherds and husbandmen, its origin has been ascribed. Where proof cannot be procured, we must be content with conjecture: classic or foreign lore can claim no share in the inspiration which comes from nature's free grace and liberality. From whatever source our poetry has sprung, it wears the character and bears the image of the north: the learned and the ignorant have felt alike its tenderness and humour, dignity and ardour; and both have united in claiming, as its brightest ornament, the poetry of Him of whose life and works I am now about to write. This, however, has already been done with so much affection by Currie, care by Walker, and manliness by Lockhart—the genius, the manners, and fortunes of Burns have been discussed so fully by critics of all classes, and writers of

all ranks, that little remains for a new adventurer in the realms of biography save to extract from the works of others a clear and judicious narrative. But, like the artist who founds a statue out of old materials, he has to reproduce them in a new shape, touch them with the light of other feeling, and inform them with fresh spirit and sentiment.

Robert Burns, eldest son of William Burness and Agnes Brown his wife, was born 25th January, 1759, in a clay-built cottage, raised by his father's own hands, on the banks of the Doon, in the district of Kyle, and county of Ayr. The season was ungentle and rough, the walls weak and new:—some days after his birth a wind arose which crushed the frail structure, and the unconscious Poet was carried unharmed to the shelter of a neighbouring house. He loved to allude, when he grew up, to this circumstance; and ironically claim some commiseration for the stormy passions of one ushered into the world by a tempest. This rude edifice is now an alehouse, and belongs to the shoemakers of Ayr: the recess in the wall, where the bed stood in which he was born, is pointed out to inquiring guests; the sagacious landlord remembers, too, as he brings in the ale, that he has seen and conversed with Burns, and ventures to relate traits of his person and manners. There is nothing very picturesque about the cottage or its surrounding grounds: the admirers of the Muse's haunts will see little to call romantic in low meadows, flat enclosures, and long lines of public road. Yet the district, now emphatically called "The Land of Burns," has many attractions. There

are fair streams, beautiful glens, rich pastures, picturesque patches of old natural wood; and, if we may trust proverbial rhyme, " Kyle for a man" is a boast of old standing. The birth of the illustrious Poet has caused the vaunt to be renewed in our own days.

The mother of Burns was a native of the county of Ayr; her birth was humble, and her personal attractions moderate; yet, in all other respects, she was a remarkable woman. She was blessed with singular equanimity of temper; her religious feeling was deep and constant; she loved a well-regulated household; and it was frequently her pleasure to give wings to the weary hours of a chequered life by chaunting old songs and ballads, of which she had a large store. In her looks she resembled her eldest son; her eyes were bright and intelligent; her perception of character, quick and keen. She lived to a great age, rejoiced in the fame of the Poet, and partook of the fruits of his genius.

His father was from another district. He was the son of a farmer in Kincardineshire, and born on the lands of the noble family of Keith Marischall. The retainer, like his chief, fell into misfortunes; his household was scattered, and William Burness, with a small knowledge of farming, and a large stock of speculative theology, was obliged to leave his native place, in search of better fortune, at the age of nineteen. He has been heard to relate with what bitter feelings he bade farewell to his younger brother on the top of a lonely hill, and turned his face toward the border. His first resting-place was

Edinburgh, where he obtained a slight knowledge of gardening; thence he went into Ayrshire, and procured employment, in the double capacity of steward and gardener, from Ferguson of Doonside. Imagining now that he had established a resting-place, he took a wife, leased a small patch of land for a nursery, and raised that frail shealing, the catastrophe of which has already been related.

During his residence with the laird of Doonside, a rumour was circulated that William Burness had fought for our old line of princes in the late rebellion—the fatal 1745. His austere and somewhat stately manners caused him to be looked on as a man who had a secret in reserve, which he desired to conceal; and, as a report of that kind was not calculated for his good, he procured a contradiction from the hand of the clergyman of his native parish, acquitting him of all participation in the late "wicked rebellion." I mention this, inasmuch as the Poet, speaking of his forefathers, says, "they followed boldly where their leaders led," and hints that they suffered in the cause which crushed the fortunes of their chief. Gilbert Burns, a sensible man, but no poet, imagined he read in his brother's words an imputation on the family loyalty, and hastened to contradict it, long after his father had gone where the loyal or rebellious alike find peace. He considered his father's religious turn of mind, and the certificate of his parish minister as decisive: and so they are, as far as regards William Burness; but the Keiths Marischall were forfeited before he was born, and the Poet plainly alludes to earlier matters

than the affair of the "Forty-five."—"My ancestors," he says, "rented lands of the noble Keiths Marischall, and had the honour of sharing their fate. I mention this circumstance, because it threw my father on the world at large." Here he means that the misfortunes of the fathers were felt by the children; he was accurate in all things else, and it is probable he related what his father told him. The feelings of the Poet were very early coloured with Jacobitism.

Though William Burness sought only at first to add the profits of a small stewardship to those of a little garden or nursery, and toiled along with his wife to secure food and clothing, his increasing family induced him to extend his views; and he accordingly ventured to lease Mount Oliphant, a neighbouring farm of a hundred acres, and entered upon it when Robert was between six and seven years old. The elder Burns seems to have been but an indifferent judge of land: in a district where much fine ground is in cultivation, he sat down on a sterile and hungry spot, which no labour could render fruitful. He had commenced, too, on borrowed money; the seasons as well as the soil, proved churlish; and Ferguson his friend dying, "a stern factor," says Robert, "whose threatening letters set us all in tears," interposed; and he was compelled, after a six years' struggle, to relinquish the lease. This harshness was remembered in other days: the factor sat for that living portrait of insolence and wrong in the "Twa Dogs." How easily may endless infamy be purchased!

From this inhospitable spot William Burness removed his household to Lochlea, a larger and better farm, some ten miles off, in the parish of Tarbolton. Here he seemed at once to strike root and prosper. He was still strong in body, ardent in mind, and unsubdued in spirit. Every day, too, was bringing vigour to his sons, who, though mere boys, took more than their proper share of toil; while his wife superintended, with care and success, the whole system of in-door economy. But it seemed as if fortune had determined that nought he set his heart on should prosper. For four years, indeed, seasons were favourable, and markets good; but, in the fifth year, there ensued a change. It was in vain that he laboured with head and hand, and resolved to be economical and saving. In vain Robert held the plough with the dexterity of a man by day, and thrashed and prepared corn for seed or for sale, evening and morning, before the sun rose and after it set. "The gloom of hermits, and the unceasing moil of galley slaves," were endured to no purpose; and, to crown all, a difference arose between the tenant and his landlord, as to terms of lease and rotation of crop. The farmer, a stern man, self-willed as well as devoutly honest, admitted but of one interpretation to ambiguous words. The proprietor, accustomed to give law rather than receive it, explained them to his own advantage; and the declining years of this good man, and the early years of his eminent son, were embittered by disputes, in which sensitive natures suffer and worldly ones thrive.

Amid all these toils and trials, William Burness remembered the worth of religious instruction, and the usefulness of education in the rearing of his children. The former task he took upon himself, and, in a little manual of devotion still extant, sought to soften the rigour of the Calvinistic creed into the gentler Arminian. He set, too, the example which he taught. He abstained from all profane swearing and vain discourse, and shunned all approach to levity of conversation or behaviour. A week-day in his house wore the sobriety of a Sunday; nor did he fail in performing family worship in a way which enabled his son to give the world that fine picture of domestic devotion, the "Cottar's Saturday Night." The depressing cares of the world, and a consciousness, perhaps, that he was fighting a losing battle, brought an almost habitual gloom to his brow. He had nothing to cheer him but a sense of having done his duty. The education of his sons he confided to other hands. At first he sent Robert to a small school at Alloway Miln, within a mile of the place of his birth; but the master was removed to a better situation, and his place was supplied by John Murdoch, a candidate for the honours of the church, who undertook, at a moderate salary, to teach the boys of Lochlea, and the children of five other neighbouring farmers, reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and Latin. He was a young man, a good scholar, and an enthusiastic instructor, with a moderate knowledge of human nature, and a competent share of pedantry. He made himself acceptable to the elder Burness by engaging in con-

versations on speculative theology, and in lending his learning to aid the other's sagacity and penetration; and he rendered himself welcome to Robert by bringing him knowledge of any kind—by giving him books — telling him about eminent men—and teaching him the art—which he was not slow in learning—of opening up fresh sources of information for himself,

Of the progress which Robert made in knowledge, his teacher has given us a very clear account. In reading, writing, and arithmetic, he excelled all boys of his own age, and took rank above several who were his seniors. The New Testament, the Bible, the English Grammar, and Mason's collection of verse and prose, laid the foundation of devotion and knowledge. As soon as he was capable of understanding composition, Murdoch taught him to turn verse into its natural prose order; sometimes to substitute synonymous expressions for poetical words, and to supply all the ellipses. By these means he perceived when his pupil knew the meaning of his author, and thus sought to instruct him in the proper arrangement of words, as well as variety of expression. For some two years and a half, Robert continued to receive the instructions of his excellent teacher under his father's roof. On Murdoch's nomination to the Grammar School of Ayr, his pupil did not forsake him, but took lodgings with him; and, during the ordinary school hours, walks in the evening, and other moments of leisure, he sought to master the grammar, in order to take upon himself the task of instructing his brothers and sisters at

home. Under the same kind instructor he strove to obtain some knowledge of French. "When walking together, and even at meals," says Murdoch, "I was constantly telling him the names of different objects, as they presented themselves, in French, so that he was hourly laying in a stock of words, and sometimes little phrases. In short, he took such pleasure in learning, and I in teaching, that it was difficult to say which of the two was most zealous in the business; and about the end of our second week of study of the French, we began to read a little of the Adventures of Telemachus, in Fenelon's own words." All the French which the young Poet picked up, during one fortnight's course of instruction, could not be much; the coming of harvest called him to more laborious duties; nor did he, save for a passing hour or so, ever resume his studies in Telemachus.

Of these early and interesting days, during which the future man was seen, like fruit shaping amid the unfolded bloom, we have a picture drawn by the Poet's own hand, and touched off in his own vivid manner.—"At seven years of age I was by no means a favourite with any body. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot piety—I say, idiot piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar; and, by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. The earliest composition that I recollect taking plea-

sure in, was the Vision of Mirza, and a hymn of Addison's, beginning,

"How are thy servants blest, O Lord!"

I particularly remember one half-stanza, which was music to my ear—

"For though on dreadful whirls we hung,
High on the broken wave."

I met with these in Mason's English collection, one of my school-books. The two first books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two I have read since, were the Life of Hannibal, and the History of the Acts and Deeds of Sir William Wallace. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest."

The education of Burns was not over when the school-doors were shut. The peasantry of Scotland turn their cottages into schools; and when a father takes his arm-chair by the evening fire, he seldom neglects to communicate to his children whatever knowledge he possesses himself. Nor is this knowledge very limited; it extends, generally, to the history of Europe, and to the literature of the island; but more particularly to the divinity, the poetry, and, what may be called, the traditionary history of Scotland. An intelligent peasant is intimate with all those skirmishes, sieges, combats, and quarrels, domestic or national, of which public writers take no

account. Genealogies of the chief families are quite familiar to him. He has by heart, too, whole volumes of songs and ballads; nay, long poems sometimes abide in his recollection; nor will he think his knowledge much, unless he knows a little about the lives and actions of the men who have done most honour to Scotland. In addition to what he has on his memory, we may mention what he has on the shelf. A common husbandman is frequently master of a little library: history, divinity, and poetry, but most so the latter, compose his collection. Milton and Young are favourites; the flowery Meditations of Hervey, the religious romance of the Pilgrim's Progress, are seldom absent; while of Scottish books, Ramsay, Thomson, Fergusson, and now Burns, together with songs and ballad-books innumerable, are all huddled together, soiled with smoke, and frail and tattered by frequent use. The household of William Burness was an example of what I have described; and there is some truth in the assertion, that in true knowledge the Poet was, at nineteen, a better scholar than nine-tenths of our young gentlemen when they leave school for the college.

Let us look into this a little more closely; nor can we see with a clearer light than what Burns himself has afforded us.—"What I knew of ancient story," he observes, "was gathered from Salmon and Guthrie's Geographical Grammars; and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature and criticism, I got from the Spectator. These, with Pope's Works, some plays of Shakspeare, Tull and Dickson on Agriculture, the Heathen Pantheon,

Locke on the Human Understanding, Stackhouse's History of the Bible, Justice's British Gardener's Dictionary, Bayle's Lectures, Allan Ramsay's Works, Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, A Select Collection of English Songs, and Hervey's Meditations, had formed the whole of my reading." But when to these we add Young's Night Thoughts, which his own poems prove him to have admired, we cannot see that we have advanced far on the way in which he walked, when he disciplined himself for the service of the Scottish muse. In truth, none of the works we have enumerated, save the poems of Allan Ramsay, could be of farther use to him than to fill his mind with information, and shew him what others had done. The "Address to the Deil," "Highland Mary," and "Tam o' Shanter" are the fruit of far different studies.

Burns had, in truth, a secret school of study, in which he set up other models for imitation than Pope or Hervey.—"In my infant and boyish days," he observes to Doctor Moore, "I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family (Jenny Wilson by name), remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poesie; but had so strong an effect upon my imagination that to this hour in my nocturnal rambles I sometimes keep a look-out

in suspicious places." Here we have the Poet taking lessons in the classic lore of his native land and profiting largely; yet, to please a scholar like his correspondent, he calls his instructress an ignorant old woman, and her stories idle trumpery. Let the name of Jenny Wilson be reverenced by all lovers of the northern muse; her tales gave colour and character to many fine effusions. The supernatural in these legends was corrected and modified by the natural which his growing sense saw in human life, and found in the songs of his native land.—"The collection of songs," he says, "was my *vade-mecum.* I pored over them, driving my cart or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse, carefully noting the true tender or sublime from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic craft, such as it is." The songs of Scotland had, in no remote day, the advantages of the schooling which in these early hours he gave his fancy and understanding.

He had not yet completed these unconscious studies. In his farther progress his mother was his instructress. Her rectitude of heart, and the fine example of her husband, made an impression too strong to be ever effaced from the mind of her son. This was strengthened by the songs and ballads which she commonly chaunted; they all wore a moral hue. The ballad which she loved most to sing, or her son to hear, is one called "The Life and Age of Man." It is a work of imagination and piety, full of quaintness and nature; it compares the various periods of man's life to the months of the

year; and the parallel is both ingenious and poetic. —"I had an old grand-uncle," says Burns, "with whom my mother lived a while in her girlish years: the good old man, for such he was, was long blind ere he died, during which time his highest enjoyment was to sit down and cry, while my mother would sing the simple old song of 'The Life and Age of Man.'" The mother of the Poet, on being questioned respecting it, some years before her death, repeated the ballad word for word, saying it was one of the many nursery songs of her mother, and that she first heard and learned it from her seventy years before. The noble poem of "Man was made to Mourn," bears a close resemblance to this old strain, both in language and sentiment. It taught Burns the art, which too few learn, of adding a moral aim to his verse; and though he rose in song to the highest pitch of moral pathos and sublimity, he took his first lesson from this now neglected ballad. In all his letters and memoranda, we see him continually pointing to the rustic productions with which he was in youth familiar, and thus affording us in some measure the means of knowing how little of his excellence is reflected from others, and how much we owe to his own inspiration.

A student in art first studies the works of earlier masters; as he advances, living figures are placed before him, that he may see nature with his own eyes. Burns, who knew nothing of academic rules, pursued a similar course in poetry. He had become acquainted with limb and lineament of the muse, as she had been seen by others: he could learn no

more from the dead, and now had recourse to the living: he had hitherto looked on in silence; it was now time to speak. Beauty first gave utterance to his crowding thoughts ; with him love and poetry were coevals. "You know," he says, in his communication to Moore, "our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn, my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language ; but you know the Scottish idiom, 'she was a bonnie sweet sonsie lass.' In short, she altogether, unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and bookworm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below ! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell. You medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, &c. ; but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed, I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours—why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Eolian harp—and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sang sweetly ; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that

I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a country laird's son on one of his father's maids with whom he was in love: and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he—for, excepting that he could smear sheep and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar craft than myself. Thus with me began love and poetry." This intercourse with the softer and gentler part of the creation—this feeling in the presence of youth and loveliness, and desire to give voice to his passion in song—were, to his slumbering emotions, what the voice in scripture was, among the "dry bones of the valley," calling them into life and action. It is true that his brother looked upon some of the ladies of these early verses as so many moving broomsticks on which fancy hung her garlands. They seemed otherwise to the Poet. He saw charms in them which prosaic spirits failed to see. We would take the word of the muse in such matters against a whole battalion of men,

> "Who, darkling, grub this earthly hole
> In low pursuit."

Having given, as he said, his "heart a heeze" among those soft companions, the Poet, like the picker of samphire on the beetling cliff, proceeded to seek farther knowledge in a perilous place—*viz.* among the young and the heedless—"the ram-stam squad, who zigzag on," without any settled aim or a wish ungratified. He offended his father, by giving his "manners a brush" at a country dancing-

school. The good man had no sincere dislike, as some Calvinists have, to this accomplishment; still he tolerated rather than approved of it; he did not imagine that religion took to the barn-floor,

"And reel'd, and set, and cross'd, and cleeket;"

cracking her thumbs and distorting, as Milton says, her "clergy climbs," to the sound of a fiddle; dancing, in short, he shook his head at, though he did not frown. The Poet felt, therefore, that in this he had approached at least to disobedience—a circumstance which he regrets in after-life, and regards as the first step from the paths of strictness and sobriety. "The will-o'-wisp meteors of thoughtless whim" began, he says, to be almost the sole lights of his way: yet early-ingrained piety preserved his innocence, though it could not keep him from folly. "The great misfortune of my life," he wisely says, "was to want an aim. The only two openings by which I could enter the temple of fortune was the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture, I never could squeeze myself into it; the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance. Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity as from a pride of observation and remark—a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly solitude; add to these incentives to social life my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought something like the rudiments of good sense; and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a wel-

come guest where I visited; or any great wonder that where two or three met together, there was I among them. Another circumstance in my life, which made some alteration in my mind and manners, was, that I spent my nineteenth summer on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home, at a noted school to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, &c., in which I made pretty good progress. But I made greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were till this time new to me; but I was no enemy to social life. Here, though I learnt to fill my glass and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a high hand with my geometry till the sun entered Virgo—a month which is always a carnival in my bosom—when a charming filette, who lived next door to the school, upset my trigonometry, and set me off at a tangent from the sphere of my studies." Nature, in all this, was pursuing her own plan in the education of Burns. The melancholy of which he complains was a portion of his genius; the invisible object to which he was impelled was poetry. No one can fail to perceive, in the scenes which he describes as dear to his heart and fancy, the very materials over which his muse afterwards breathed life and inspiration; and no one can fail to feel, that all this time he had been walking in the path of the muse without knowing it.

He complains that he was unfitted with an aim.

He looked around, and saw no outlet for his ambition. Farming he failed to find the same as it is in Virgil—elegance united with toil. The high places of the land were occupied, and no one could hope to ascend save the titled or the wealthy. The church he could not reach without an expensive education, or patronage less attainable still. Law held out temptation to talent, but not to talent without money, while the army opened its glittering files to him who could purchase a commission, or had, in the words of the divine,

"A beauteous sister or convenient wife,"

to smooth the way to preferment. With a consciousness of genius, and a desire of distinction, he stood motionless, like a stranded vessel whose sails are still set, her colours flying, and the mariners aboard. He had now and then a sort of vague intimation from his own heart that he was a poet; but the polished and stately versification of English poetry alarmed and dismayed him: he had sung to himself a song or two, and stood with his hand on the plough and his heart with the muse. The strength which he could not himself discover was not likely to be found out by others. It is thus we find him spoken of by his good old kind preceptor:—"Gilbert," says Murdoch, "always appeared to me to possess a more lively imagination, and to be more of the wit than Robert. I attempted to teach them a little church-music. Robert's ear, in particular, was remarkably dull, and his voice untuneable. It was long before I could get him to distinguish one tune from another. Robert's countenance was generally

grave, and expressive of a serious, contemplative, and thoughtful mind. Gilbert's face said—

"Mirth, with thee I mean to live;"

and, certainly, if any person who knew the two boys had been asked which of them was most likely to court the muses, he would surely never have guessed that Robert had a propensity of that kind." The simple schoolmaster had perhaps paid court to some small heritor's daughter, and dressed his face in smiles for the task; he accordingly thought that the Muse was to be wooed and won in the same Malvolio way, and never imagined that the face inspired with contemplation and melancholy could be dear to her heart.

While the boy was thus rising into the man, and the mind was expanding with the body, both were in danger of being crushed, as the daisy was, in the Poet's own immortal strains, beneath the weight of the furrow. The whole life of his father was a continued contest with fortune. Burns saw, as he grew up, to what those days of labour and nights of anxiety would lead, and set himself, with heart and hand, to lighten the one and alleviate the other. At the plough, scythe, and reaping-hook he feared no competitor, and so set all fears of want in his own person at defiance: he felt but for his father. All this is touchingly described by Gilbert. "My brother, at the age of thirteen, assisted in thrashing the crop of corn, and, at fifteen, was the principal labourer on the farm; for we had no hired servant, male or female. The anguish of mind we felt, at our tender years, under these straits and difficulties, was very

great. To think of our father growing old—for he was now above fifty, broken down with the long-continued fatigues of his life, with a wife and five other children, and in a declining state of circumstances—these reflections produced in my brother's mind and mine sensations of the deepest distress. At this time he was almost constantly afflicted in the evenings with a dull head-ache, which, at a future period of his life, was exchanged for a palpitation of the heart, and a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed in the night-time." The elder Burness, while in the Lothians, had paid attention to gardening; but he could not bring much agricultural knowledge from his native county. His toil was incessant; but it was of the body, not of the brain. More is required in farming than mere animal vigour and dexterity of hand. A skilful farmer may be called a learned man;—to work according to the season, and in the spirit of the soil; to anticipate sunshine, and be prepared for storms; to calculate chances and consequences; suit demands at home, and fit markets abroad, require what not many fully possess.

I know not how much of this knowledge William Burness possessed. He was, however, fertile in expedients: when he found that his farm was unproductive in corn, he thought the soil suitable for flax, and resolved himself to raise the commodity, while to the Poet he allotted the task of manufacturing it for the market. To accomplish this, it was necessary that he should be instructed in flax-dressing: accordingly, at Midsummer, 1781, Robert went to

Irvine, where he wrought under the eye of one Peacock, kinsman to his mother. His mode of life was frugal enough. "He possessed," says Currie, "a single room for his lodging, rented, perhaps, at the rate of a shilling a week. He passed his days in constant labour as a flax-dresser, and his food consisted chiefly of oatmeal sent to him from his father's family." A picture of his situation and feelings is luckily preserved of his own drawing: the simplicity of the expression, and pure English of the style, are not its highest qualities. He thus wrote to his father: "Honoured Sir:—I have purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New-year's day: but work comes so hard upon us that I do not choose to be absent on that account. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder, and on the whole I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind that I dare neither review past wants, nor look forward into futurity: for the least anxiety or perturbation in my breast produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, and uneasinesses, and disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of

it: and, if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

"As for this world," he continues, "I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed, I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing, to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which I hope have been remembered ere it is yet too late." This letter is dated December 27, 1781. No one can mistake the cause of his melancholy: obscure toil and an undistinguished lot on earth, directed his thoughts in despair to another world, where the righteous "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." To plough, and sow, and reap were poetic labours, compared to the dusty toil of a flax-dresser: with the lark for his companion, and the green fields around him, his spirits rose, and he looked on himself as forming a part of creation: but when he sat down to the brake and the hackle, his spirits sank, and his dreams of ambition vanished.

Flax-dressing, in the poet's estimation, seemed any thing but the way to wealth and fame: the desponding tone of his letter was no good augury; the catastrophe of the business is not quite in keeping

with quotations from Scripture and hopes in heaven. "Partly through whim," said the bard to Moore, "and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined a flax-dresser in Irvine to learn his trade. This was an unlucky affair: as we were giving a welcome carousal to the new year, the shop took fire and burnt to ashes, and I was left like a true poet, not worth a sixpence." This disaster was followed by one much more grievous. "The clouds of misfortune," says Burns, "were gathering fast round my father's head. After three years tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, he was just saved from the horrors of a jail by a consumption, which after two years promises, kindly stept in and carried him away to where the 'wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' His all went among the hell-hounds that prowl in the kennel of justice. The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file was my constitutional melancholy being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—'Depart from me, ye accursed!'" The intelligence, rectitude, and piety of William Burness were an honour to the class to which he belonged: his eminent son acknowledged, when his own intercourse with the world entitled his opinions to respect, that he had met with few who understood men, their manners and their ways, equal to his father: "but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility," he added, "are disqualifying circumstances in the paths of fortune."

Robert and his brother were afflicted, but did not despair; they collected together the little property which law and misfortune had spared, and, in the year 1784, took the farm of Mossgiel, near Mauchline, consisting of 118 acres, at an annual rent of ninety pounds. Their mother superintended the dairy and the household, while the Poet and Gilbert undertook for the rest. "It was," observes the latter, "a joint concern among us: every member of the family was allowed wages for the labour performed; my brother's allowance and mine was seven pounds per annum, and his expenses never in any year exceeded his slender income. His temperance and frugality were every thing that could be wished." It is pleasing to contemplate a picture such as this.

We are now about to enter into the regions of romance. "I began," says Burns, "to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes." The course of his life hitherto has shewn that his true vocation was neither the plough nor the hackle. He acquired, indeed, the common knowledge of a husbandman; but that was all he knew or cared to know of the matter. "Farmer Attention," says the proverb, "is a good farmer all the world over;" and Burns was attentive as far as ploughing, sowing, harrowing, reaping, stacking, thrashing, winnowing, and selling went; he did all this by a sort of mechanical impulse, but success in farming demands more. The farmer should know what is doing in his way in the world around; he must learn to anticipate demand, and, in short, to *time* every thing. But he who pens an ode on his sheep when he should be

driving them forth to pasture—who stops his plough in the half-drawn furrow, to rhyme about the flowers which he buries—who sees visions on his way from market, and makes rhymes on them—who writes an ode on the horse he is about to yoke, and a ballad on the girl who shews the whitest hands and brightest eyes among his reapers—has no chance of ever growing opulent, or of purchasing the field on which he toils. The bard amidst his ripening corn, or walking through his fields of grass and clover, beholds on all sides images of pathos or of beauty, connects them with moral influences, and lifts himself to heaven : a grosser mortal sees only so many acres of promising corn or fattening grass, connects them with rising markets and increasing gain, and, instead of rising, descends into " Mammon's filthy delve." That poetic feelings and fancies such as these passed frequently over the mind of Burns in his early days, we have his own assurance ; while labour held his body, poetry seized his spirit, and, unconsciously to himself, asserted her right and triumphed in her victory.

Some obey the call of learning and become poets, others fall, they know not how, into the company of the muse, and break out into numbers. Love was the voice which called up the poet in Burns ; his Parnassus was the stubble-field, and his inspirer that [illegible]-haired girl from whose hands he picked the thistle-stings, and delighted to walk with when but some fifteen years old. The song which he made in her praise he noted down in a little book, entitled " Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poetry, by Robert Burness ; a man who had little art in making

money, and still less in keeping it." "I composed the song," he said, "long afterwards, in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and I never recollect it but my heart melts and my blood sallies." The passion which he felt failed to find its way into the verse; there is some nature, but no inspiration :—

"My Nelly's looks are blythe and sweet,
And what is best of a'—
Her reputation is complete,
And fair without a flaw.
She dresses ay sae clean and neat,
Both decent and genteel;
And then there's something in her gait
Gars ony dress look weel."

These lines give little indication of future strength; his vigour of thought increased with his stature; before he was a year older, the language of his muse was more manly and bold :—

"I dreamed I lay where flowers were springing,
Gaily in the sunny beam,
Listening to the wild birds singing
By a falling crystal stream;
Straight the sky grew black and daring,
Thro' the woods the whirlwinds rave,
Trees, with aged arms, are warring,
O'er the swelling drumlie wave."

Few of the early verses of Burns are preserved; some he himself destroyed, others were composed, but not, perhaps, committed to paper; while it is likely that not a few are entirely lost. In his nineteenth summer, the leisure season of the farmer, while studying mensuration at a school on the sea-coast, he met with the Peggy of one of his earliest songs. "Stepping into the garden," he says, "one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, there I met my angel—

"Like Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower."

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I staid, I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless." On his return home the harvest was commenced. To the fair lass of Kirkoswald he dedicated the first fruits of his fancy, in a strain of equal freedom and respect, beginning—

"Now wastlin' winds and slaught'ring guns
  Bring autumn's pleasant weather;
The moorcock springs on whirring wings
  Amang the blooming heather;
Now waving grain wide o'er the plain
  Delights the weary farmer,
And the moon shines bright when I rove at night
  To muse upon my charmer."

In a still richer strain he celebrates his nocturnal adventures with another of the fair ones of the west. Burns could now write as readily as he could speak, and pour the passion which kindled up his veins into his compositions. It is thus he sings of Annie—

"I hae been blythe wi' comrades dear,
  I hae been merry drinkin';
I hae been joyfu' gatherin' gear,
  I hae been happy thinkin;
But a' the pleasures e'er I saw,
  Tho' three times doubled fairly,
That happy night was worth them a'
  Amang the rigs o' barley."

He who could write such lines as these had little to learn from the muse; and yet he soon surpassed them in liquid ease of expression and happy originality of sentiment. It is one of the delusions of his biographers, that the sources of his inspiration

are to be sought in English poetry; but, save an image from Young, and a word or so from Shakspeare, there is no trace of them in all his compositions. Burns read the English poets no doubt with wonder and delight: but he felt he was not of their school; the language of life with him was wholly different; the English language is, to a Scottish peasant, much the same as a foreign tongue; it was not without reason that Murray, the oriental scholar, declared that the English of Milton was less easy to learn than the Latin of Virgil. Any one conversant with our northern lyrics will know what school of verse Burns imitated when he sang of Nannie—a lass who dwelt on the banks of the Lugar:—

"Behind yon hills where Lugar flows,
'Mang moors an' mosses many, O;
The wintry sun the day has closed
And I'll awa' to Nannie, O.

"Her face is fair, her heart is true,
As spotless as she's bonnie, O;
The opening gowan, wat wi' dew,
Nae purer is than Nannie, O."

Such was the language in which the Poet addressed the rustic damsels of Kyle; ladies are not very apt to be won by verse, let it be ever so elegant; they set down the person who adorns them with the lilies and the roses of imagination as a dreamer, and look around for more substantial comfort. Waller's praise made Sacharissa smile—and smile only; and another lady of equal beauty saw in Lord Byron a pale-faced lad, lame of a foot, and married a man who could leap a five-barred gate; yet Burns was, or imagined himself, beloved; he wrote from his own immediate emotions; his muse

was no visionary dweller by an imaginary fountain, but a substantial

"Fresh young landart-lass,"

whose charms had touched his fancy. Nor was he one of those who look high and muse on dames nursed in velvet laps, and fed with golden spoons. "He had always," says Gilbert, "a particular jealousy of people who were richer than himself; his love, therefore, rarely settled on persons of this description. When he selected any one out of the sovereignty of his good pleasure to whom he should pay his particular attention, she was instantly invested with a sufficient stock of charms out of the plentiful stores of his own imagination; and there was often a great dissimilitude between his fair captivator as she appeared to others, and as she seemed when invested with the attributes he gave her." His own words partly confirm the account of Gilbert. "My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and, as in every other warfare of this world, my fortune was various, sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes mortified with repulse." That his love was sometimes repulsed, we have the assurance of a poem, now lost, in which, like Cowley, he had recorded his labours in the way of affection; when doors were closed against him, or the Annie or Nannie of the hour failed in their promises, he added another verse to the ballad, the o'erword of which was, "So I'll to my Latin again." If he sought consolation in studying the Latin rudiments when jilted, his disappointments in that way could not be many, for

his knowledge of the language was small. In his twenty-fourth year his skill in verse enabled him to add the crowning glory to his lyric compositions; who the lady was that inspired it we are not told, but she must have been more than commonly beautiful, or more than usually kind: as the concluding compliment might have been too much for one, he has wisely bestowed it on the whole sex; the praise of other poets fades away before it;

> "There's nought but care on every han',
>   In every hour that passes, O!
> What signifies the life o' man
>   An' 'twere na for the lasses, O!
>
> "Auld nature swears the lovely dears
>   Her noblest work she classes, O!
> Her 'prentice han' she tried on man,
>   An' then she made the lasses, O!"

The progress which Burns made in the more serious kind of verse during this lyrical fit was not at all so brilliant; his attempts have more of the language of poetry than of its simple force and true dignity. There are passages, indeed, of great truth and vigour, but no continued strain either to rival his after flights, or compare with the unity and finished excellence of "My Nannie, O," and "Green grow the Rashes." He had prepared himself, however, for those more prolonged efforts; nature had endowed him with fine sensibility of heart and grandeur of soul; he had made himself familiar with nature, animate and inanimate; with the gentleness of spring, the beauty of summer, the magnificence of autumn, and the stormy sublimity of winter; nor was he less so with rural man, and his passions and pursuits. Though indulging in no sustained flights

he had now and then sudden bursts in which his feelings over-mastered all restraint. The following stanza, written in his twenty-fourth year, shows he had read Young, and felt the resemblance which the season of winter bore to his own clouded fortunes:—

"The sweeping blast, the sky o'ercast,
  The joyless winter day,
Let others fear, to me more dear
  Than all the pride of May:
The tempest's howl, it soothes my soul,
  My griefs it seems to join;
The leafless trees my fancy please,
  Their fate resembles mine."

"There is scarcely any earthly object," says Burns, "gives me more—I do not know that I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or a high plantation, in a cloudy winter day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion: my mind is rapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him who, in the pompous language of the Hebrew bard, 'walks on the wings of the wind.'" In another mood he wrote what he called "a wild rhapsody, miserably deficient in versification, but full of the sentiment of my heart." This ditty wants harmony and vivid force of expression: but it breathes of the old ballad:

"My father was a farmer,
  Upon the Carrick border,
And carefully he bred me up
  In decency and order:
He bade me act a manly part,
  Though I had ne'er a farthing,
For without an honest manly heart
  No man was worth regarding."

In one of his desponding fits, when he "looked

back on prospects drear," or beheld the future darkening, he wrote that Prayer in which some have seen nothing but sentiments of contrition and submissiveness, and others a desire to lay on the Creator the blame of the follies with which he charges himself. I have heard his enemies quote the following verse with an air of triumph :—

" Thou knowest that Thou hast formed me
With passions wild and strong,
And, listening to their witching voice,
Has often led me wrong."

Poetry had now become with Burns a darling pursuit : he had no settled plan of study, for he composed at the plough, at the harrow, and with the reaping-hook in his hand, and usually had half-a-dozen or more poems in progress, taking them up as the momentary tone of his mind suited the sentiment of the verse, and laying them down as he grew careless or became fatigued. None of the verses of those days are in existence, save the " Death of Poor Mailie," a performance remarkable for genuine simplicity of expression ; and " John Barleycorn," a clever imitation of the old ballads of that name, a favourite subject with the minstrels of Caledonia. His mode of composition was singular : when he hit off a happy verse in a random fit of inspiration, he sought for a subject suitable to its tone of language and feeling, and then completed the poem. This shows a mind full of the elements of poetry. " My passions," he said, " when once lighted up, raged like so many devils till they got vent in rhyme, and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet,"

When Burns succeeded in evoking the demon of passion by the spell of verse, he had leisure, or at least peace, for a time; but he could not be idle: he turned his attention to prose. His boyish feelings had been touched, he tells us, on reading the Vision of Mirza, and many passages in the Bible; he had read too with attention a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign. This improved his taste; and as he grew up, and correspondence was forced upon him by business or by friendship, he was pleased to see that he could express himself with fluency and ease. He thought so well of those performances that he made copies of them, and, in moments of leisure or vanity sought and found satisfaction in comparing them with the compositions of his companions. He observed, he said, his own superiority. Nay, he says he carried the whim so far, that though he had not three farthing's worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought him as many letters as if he had been a plodding son of the day-book and ledger. He now extended his reading to the Spectator, the Man of Feeling, Tristram Shandy, Count Fathom, and Pamela: he studied as well as read them, and endeavoured to form a prose style uniting strength and purity. There are passages of genuine ease and unaffected simplicity in his early as well as his later letters; yet there is too much of a premeditated air, and a too obvious desire of showing what fine, bold, vigorous things he could say. No one, however, can peruse his prose of those days without wonder; it shows a natural vigour of mind and a

talent for observation : there are out-flashings, too, of a fiery impetuosity of spirit worthy of a genius the most cultivated as well as the most lofty, and passages of great elegance and feeling.

In his common-place book, his rhymes are accompanied with explanations in prose, and, as he commenced these insertions in April 1783, he has afforded us the means of measuring the extent of his acquirements in early life. He seemed not unconscious that he could say something worth the world's attention. —" As he was but little indebted," he said, " to scholastic education, and bred at a plough-tail, his performances must be strongly tinctured with his unpolished rustic way of life ; but it may be some entertainment to a curious observer of human nature, to see how a ploughman thinks and feels under the pressure of love, ambition, anxiety, grief, with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the modes and manners of life, operate pretty much alike on all the species."

In these compositions we may continually trace thoughts and images, which growing taste and increasing vigour enabled him afterwards to beautify and expand. The following passage suggested the fine stanza on happy love in the " Cottar's Saturday Night :"—" Notwithstanding all that has been said against love, respecting the folly and wickedness it leads a young inexperienced mind into, still I think it in a great measure deserves the highest encomiums that have been passed upon it. If any thing on earth deserves the name of rapture or transport, it is the feelings of green eighteen, in the company of the

mistress of his heart, when she repays him with an equal return of affection."

In the same strain he traces, elsewhere, the connexion between love, music, and poetry, and points out, as a fine touch in nature, that passage in a modern love composition—

"As toward her cot he jogged along,
Her name was frequent in his song"

"For my own part," he observes, "I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I once got heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were, in a manner, the spontaneous language of my heart." No one has accounted more happily for the passionate eloquence of his songs than he has done himself.

That he extended his views, and desired, after having sung of the maidens of Carrick and Kyle, to celebrate their streams and hills, and statesmen and heroes, we have evidence enough in other parts of his works.—"I am hurt," he thus writes, August 1785, "to see the other towns, rivers, woods, haughs, &c. of Scotland immortalized in song, while my dear native country, the ancient bailieries of Carrick, Kyle, and Cunningham, famous, both in ancient and modern times, for a gallant and warlike race of inhabitants—a country where civil, and particularly religious liberty, have ever found their first support and their last asylum—a country, the birth-place of many famous philosophers, soldiers and statesmen, and the scene of many important events recorded in history, particularly a great many of the actions of the glorious

Wallace—yet we have never had one Scotch poet of any eminence to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes on Ayr, and the heathy, mountainous source and winding sweep of the Doon, emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, and Tweed. This is a complaint I would gladly remedy; but, alas! I am far unequal to the task both in genius and education." No one ever remedied an evil of this kind with such decision and effect. The Ayr, the Doon, the Irvine, and the Lugar are now flowing in light, nor have their heroes and their patriots been forgotten.

In another passage he acquaints us with the models his muse set up for imitation; the date is September 1785.—"There is a noble sublimity, a heart-melting tenderness, in some of our ancient ballads, which shew them to be the work of a masterly hand, and it has often given me many a heart-ache to reflect that such glorious old bards—bards who very probably owed all their talents to native genius, yet have described the exploits of heroes, the pangs of disappointment, and the meltings of love with such fine strokes of nature, that their very names—O, how mortifying to a bard's vanity!—are now 'buried among the wreck of things which were.' O, ye illustrious names unknown! who could feel so strongly and describe so well, the last, the meanest of the muses' train—one who, though far inferior to your flights, yet eyes your path, and, with trembling wing, would sometimes soar after you; a poor rustic bard unknown pays this sympathetic pang to your memory. Some of you tell us, with all the charms of verse, that

you have been unfortunate in the world, unfortunate in love: *he*, too, has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and, worse than all, the loss of the woman he loved. Like you, all his consolation was his muse; she taught him in rustic measures to complain: happy could he have done it with your strength of imagination and flow of verse! May the turf lie lightly on your bones, and may you now enjoy that solace and rest, which the world rarely gives to the heart tuned to all the feelings of poesie and love!" Much of the man and the poet is visible in this remarkable passage; it prepares us for his approaching sun-burst of poetry, which lightened more than Carrick and Kyle.

Those who imagine Burns to have been only a rhyming, raving youth, who sauntered on the banks of streams, in lonely glens, and by castles gray, musing on the moon, and woman, and other inconstant things, do him injustice; a letter in 1783 to his cousin, James Burness, writer in Montrose, shews something of the world around him.—"This country, till of late, was flourishing incredibly in the manufacture of silk, lawn, and carpet-weaving; and we are still carrying on a good deal in that way, but much reduced from what it was. We had also a fine trade in the shoe way, but now entirely ruined, and hundreds driven to a starving condition on account of it. Farming is also at a very low ebb with us. Our lands, generally speaking, are mountainous and barren; and our landholders, full of ideas of farming, gathered from England and the Lothians, and other rich soils in Scotland, make no allowance

for the odds in the quality of land, and consequently stretch as much beyond what in the event we will be found able to pay. We are also much at a loss for want of proper methods in our improvements of farming. Necessity compels us to leave our old schemes, and few of us have opportunities of being well informed on new ones. In short, my dear Sir, since the unfortunate beginning of this American war, and its still more unfortunate conclusion, this country has been, and still is decaying very fast." Here the poet is sunk, and the observing farmer rises: in the same letter he touches on a theme which had its influence on his own character and habits—at least he imagined so.

"There is a great trade of smuggling carried on along our coasts, which, however destructive to the interests of the kingdom at large, certainly enriches this corner of it, but too often at the expense of our morals. However, it enables individuals to make, at least for a time, a splendid appearance; but fortune, as is usual with her when she is uncommonly lavish of her favours, is generally even with them at the last; and happy were it for numbers of them if she would leave them no worse than when she found them." At the period to which this refers, many farmers on the sea-coast were engaged in the contraband trade: their horses and servants were frequently employed in disposing, before the dawn, of importations made during the cloud of night; and though Burns, perhaps, took no part in the traffic, he associated with those who carried it on, and seemed to think that insight into new ways of life and hu-

man character more than recompensed him for the risk he ran. It is dangerous for a bare hand to pluck a lily from among nettles; men of few virtues and many follies are unsafe companions.

"I have often observed," he says, "in the course of my experience of human life, that every man, even the worst, has something good about him, though very often nothing else than a happy temperament of constitution inclining him to this or that virtue. For this reason no man can say in what degree any other person besides himself can be with strict justice called wicked. Let any of the strictest character for regularity of conduct among us examine impartially how many vices he has never been guilty of, not from any care or vigilance, but for want of opportunity; and how many of the weaknesses of mankind he has escaped, because he was out of the line of such temptation. I say, any man who can thus think, will scan the failings, nay, the faults and crimes, of mankind around him with a brother's eye. I have often courted the acquaintance of that part of mankind commonly known by the ordinary phrase of blackguards, sometimes further than was consistent with the safety of my character. Those who, by thoughtless prodigality or headstrong passions, have been driven to ruin, though disgraced by follies, I have yet found among them, in not a few instances, some of the noblest virtues, magnanimity, generosity, disinterested friendship, and even modesty." All this is true; but men of evil deeds are not, till they have purified themselves, fit companions for the young and the inflammatory. There

is no human being so depraved as to be without something which connects him with the sympathies of life. Dirk Hatteraick, before he hung himself, made out a balanced account to his owners, shewing that, though he had cut throats and drowned bantlings as a smuggler, he could reckon with the house of Middleburgh for every stiver. It is more pleasing to perceive, in the Poet's early prose, sentiments similar to those which he afterwards more poetically expressed in his "Address to the Rigidly Righteous."

> "Then gently scan your brother man,
> Still gentler sister woman;
> Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,
> To step aside is human.
> One point must still be greatly dark,
> The reason *why* they do it;
> And just as lamely can ye mark
> How far, perhaps, they rue it."

The people of Kyle were slow in appreciating this philosophy. When they saw him hand-and-glove with roving smugglers, or sitting with loose comrades, who scorned the decencies of life, or looking seriously at a horde of gypsies huddled together in a kiln, or musing among "randie, gangrel bodies" in Posie Nancies, they could not know that like a painter he was studying character, and making sketches for future pictures of life and manners: they saw nothing but danger to himself from such society. And here lies the secret of the complaint he has recorded against the world in his twenty-fourth year.—"I don't well know what is the reason of it, but, somehow or other, though I am pretty generally beloved, yet I never could find the art of commanding respect. I imagine it is owing to my being deficient in what

Sterne calls the understrapping virtue of discretion." No doubt of it. The sober and sedate saw that he respected not himself; they loved him for his manliness of character, and eloquence, and independence; but they grieved for a weakness out of which they could not see that strength and moral beauty would come.

The glory of his poetry was purchased at a price too dear for himself. "In Irvine," says Gilbert, "he had contracted some acquaintance of a freer manner of thinking, whose society prepared him for overleaping the bounds of rigid virtue, which had hitherto restrained him."—"The principal thing which gave my mind a turn," says Burns to Dr. Moore, "was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless child of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic; but a great man, taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the world, he went to sea in despair. His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and, of course, strove to imitate him: in some measure I succeeded. I had pride before; but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had re-

garded with horror. Here his friendship did me a mischief." The person to whom this refers, has survived the storms which threatened shipwreck to his youth, and lives respected. When spoken to on the subject, he exclaimed, "Illicit love! levity of a sailor! The Poet had nothing to learn that way when I saw him first."

That Burns talked and thought too freely and indiscreetly in his early years, we have evidence in verse. In his memorandum-book there are entries which, amid all their spirit and graphic beauty, contain levities of expression which may be tolerated when the wine is flowing and the table in a roar, but which look not so becoming on the sober page which reflection has sanctioned. In May, 1785, he wrote the lively chaunt called "Robin," in which he gives an account of his birth.

"There was a lad was born in Kyle,
But whatna day o' whatna style
I doubt its hardly worth our while
To be so nice wi' Robin.

"The gossip keekit in his loof,
Quo' she wha lives will see the proof
This waly boy will be nae coof—
I think we'll ca' him Robin.

"But sure as three times three make nine,
I see, by ilka score and line,
This chap will dearly love our kin',
So leeze me on thee, Robin."

In these lines he approaches the border-land between modesty and impropriety—we must quote no farther, nor seek to shew the Poet in still merrier moods. Burns, in all respects, arose from the people: he worked his way out of the dark-

ness, drudgery and vulgarities of rustic life, and, in spite of poverty, pain, and disappointment, emerged into the light of heaven. He was surrounded by coarse and boisterous companions, who were fit for admiring the ruder sallies of his wit, but incapable of understanding those touches of moral pathos and exquisite sensibility with which his sharpest things are accompanied. They perceived but the thorns of the rose—they felt not its fine odour. The spirit of poesie led him, in much peril, through the prosaic wilderness around, and prepared him for asserting his right to one of the highest places in the land of song.

As the elder Burness was now dead, the Poet had to exercise his own judgment in the affairs of Mossgiel: at first all seemed to prosper.—"I had entered," he says, "upon this farm with a full resolution—'Come, go to, I will be wise;' I read farming books; I calculated crops; I attended markets; and, in short, in spite of the devil, the world and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned, 'like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.'"—"The farm of Mossgiel," says Gilbert "lies very high, and mostly on a cold, wet bottom. The first four years that we were on the farm were very frosty, and the spring was very late. Our crops, in consequence, were very unprofitable, and, notwithstanding our utmost diligence and economy, we found ourselves obliged to

give up our bargain, with the loss of a considerable portion of our original stock." The judgment could not be great which selected a farm that lay high, on a cold, wet bottom, and purchased bad seed-corn. That Burns put his hand to the plough and laboured incessantly, there can be no doubt—but an unsettled head gives the hands much to do: when he put pen to paper, all thoughts of crops and cattle vanished; he only noted down ends of verse and fragments of song: his copy of Small's Treatise on Ploughs is now before me; not one remark appears on the margins; but on the title-page is written, "Robert Burns, Poet." He had now decided on his vocation.

This study of song, love of reading, wanderings in woods, nocturnal excursions in matters of love and choice of companions, who had seen much and had much to tell, was, unconsciously to himself, forcing Burns upon the regions of poesie. To these may be added the establishment of a club, in which subjects of a moral or domestic nature were discussed. The Tarbolton club consisted of some half-dozen young lads, sons of farmers; the Poet who planned it was the ruling star; the place of meeting was a small public-house in the village; the sum expended by each was not to exceed three-pence, and, with the humble cheer which this could bring, they were, when the debate was concluded, to toast their lasses and the continuance of friendship. Here he found a vent for his own notions, and as the club met regularly and continued for years, he disciplined himself into something of a debater, and acquired a

readiness and fluency of language; he was never at a loss for thoughts.

Burns drew up the regulations.—"As the great end of human society," says the exordium, "is to become wiser and better, this ought, therefore, to be the principal view of every man in every station of life. But as experience has taught us, that such studies as inform the head and mend the heart, when long continued, are apt to exhaust the faculties of the mind, it has been found proper to relieve and unbend the mind by some employment or another that may be agreeable enough to keep its powers in exercise, but, at the same time, not so serious as to exhaust them. But, superadded to this, by far the greater part of mankind are under the necessity of earning the sustenance of human life by the labour of their bodies, whereby not only the faculties of the mind, but the sinews and nerves of the body, are so fatigued that it is absolutely necessary to have recourse to some amusement or diversion, to relieve the wearied man worn down with the necessary labours of life." The first meeting was held on Halloween, in the year 1780. Burns was president, and the question of debate was, "Suppose a young man, bred a farmer, but without any fortune, has it in his power to marry either of two women, the one a girl of large fortune, but neither handsome in person nor agreeable in conversation, but who can manage the household affairs of a farm well enough; the other of them, a girl every way agreeable in person, conversation, and behaviour, but without any fortune: which of them shall he choose?" Other

questions of a similar tendency were discussed, and many matters regarding domestic duties and social obligations were considered. This rustic institution united the means of instruction with happiness ; but, on the removal of the poet from Lochlea, it lost the spirit which gave it life, and dissensions arising, the club was scattered, and the records, much of them in Burns' hand-writing, destroyed.

No sooner was the Poet settled at Mossgiel, than he was requested to aid in forming a similar club in Mauchline. The regulations of the Tarbolton institution suggested those of the other ; but the fines for non-attendance, instead of being spent in drink, were laid out in the purchase of books ; the first work thus obtained was the Mirror, the second the Lounger, and the time was not distant when the founder's genius was to supply them with a work not destined soon to die. This society subscribed for the first edition of the poems of its celebrated associate. The members were originally country lads, chiefly sons of husbandmen—a description of persons, in the opinion of Burns, more agreeable in their manners, and more desirous of improvement, than the smart, self-conceited mechanics of towns, who were ready to wrangle and dispute on all topics, and whose vanity would never allow that they were confuted.

One of the biographers of Burns has raised what the Poet calls "a philosophic reek" on the propriety of refining the minds of hinds and farmers by means of works of elegance and delicacy ; without believing, with Currie, that if not a positive evil it is a doubtful blessing, we may question whether more than a

dozen out of ten thousand hinds and mechanics would feel inconvenience from increased delicacy of taste. On a vast number such lessons would be utterly lost, for no polish can convert a common pebble into a diamond; while from the minds of many it would remove the weeds with the same discriminating hand that the Poet cleared his riggs of corn, and "spared the symbol dear," the Scottish thistle. In truth, the danger which Currie dreaded has been encountered and overcome; more than all the works he enumerated as forming the reading of Burns are to be found in the hands of the peasantry of Scotland. Milton, Thomson, Young, poets of the highest order and of polished elegance, are as well known to the peasantry as the Bible is; yet no one has complained that a furrow more or less has been drawn in consequence, that our shepherds smear their sheep with too delicate a finger, and that our rustics are oppressed by fastidious nicety of taste.

It would have been better for the Poet if he had maintained that purity in himself, which, in the regulations of his clubs, he desired to see in others. The consequences of keeping company with the free and the joyous were now to be manifested. Soon after his father's death one of his mother's maids, in person not at all attractive, produced his

"Sonsie, smirking, dear-bought Bess,"

and furnished him with the opportunity of standing as a sinner on the stool of repentance, and commemorating the event in rhymes, licentious as well as humorous. He had already sung of his own birth

in a free and witty way, and he now put a song into the mouth of the partner of his folly, in which she cries, with rather more of levity than sorrow—

"Wha will own he did the faut,
Wha will buy my groanin-maut,
Wha will tell me how to ca't?
The rantin' dog, the daddie o't.

When I mount the creepie chair,
Wha will sit beside me there?
Gie me Rob, I ask nae mair,
The rantin' dog, the daddie o't."

Nor can any one applaud the taste of "Rob the Rhymer's Address to his Illegitimate Child:" he glories in a fault which, he imagines, perplexed the church; for he sought not to conceal from himself that both the minister and elders were all but afraid of meddling with a delinquent who could make the country merry at their expense. In a third poem he gives a ludicrous account of his appearance before the session, and of the admonition he received. Instead of promising amendment, he draws consolation from Scripture with equal audacity and wit:—

"King David, of poetic brief,
Wrought 'mang the lasses such mischief
As filled his after life with grief,
And bloody rants,
And yet he's ranked 'mang the chief
Of lang syne saunts.

"And maybe, Tam, for a' my cants,
My wicked rhymes, and drunken rants,
I'll give auld Cloven-Clootie's haunts
An unco slip yet,
And snugly sit amang the saunts
At David's hip yet."

It is painful to touch, even with a gentle hand, on the moral sores of so fine a genius, but his character cannot be understood otherwise: almost

any other erring youth would have resigned himself, without resistance, to the discipline of the kirk, and bowed to its rebuke: Burns was not to be so tamed—stricken, he struck again, and, instead of courting silence and seclusion, sung a new song, and walked out into the open sunshine of remark and observation. I cannot set this regardlessness down to growing hardness within, or to petrified feeling: it arose from a want of taste in seeking distinction. "The mair they talk, I'm kenn'd the better," he had already adopted as a motto; he knew that folly such as his was not uncommon, and he hoped for one person who censured, there would be two who thought him a clever fellow, with wit at will—a little of a sinner, but a great deal of a poet.

This desire of distinction was strong in Burns. In those days he would not let a five pound note pass through his hands without bearing away a witty endorsement in rhyme: a drinking-glass always afforded space for a verse: the blank leaf of a book was a favourite place for a stanza; and the windows of inns, and even dwelling-houses which he frequented, exhibit to this day lively sallies from his hand. Yet, perhaps, a love of fame was not stronger in him than in others. In his time magazines were few, and newspapers not numerous; into the daily, weekly, or monthly papers, aspirants in verse can now pour their effusions: but Burns had no such facilities when he started, and was obliged to take the nearest way to notice. He began, likewise, to talk of his exploits over the pint-stoup: he gave to himself, in one of his rhymes, the name of "drunken

ranter," and with ordinary powers, and but a moderate inclination, desired to be numbered with five-bottle debauchees, who saw three horns on the moon, and had

"A voice like a sea, and a drouth like a whale."

He went farther: he asserted, with Meston, good rhyme to be the product of good drink, and sung—

"I've seen me daiz't upon a time
I scarce could wink, or see a styme,
Just ae half-mutchkin does me prime,
Ought less is little;
Then back I rattle on the rhyme
As gleg's a whittle."

This vaunted insobriety in verse must not be taken literally. We have seen Burns passionately in love in rhyme—we know that he was not less so with his living goddess of the hour; but it was otherwise with him in the matter of strong drink. He was no practised toper, but thought it necessary to look a gay fellow in poetry. Inspiration, in both ancient and modern times, has been imputed to wine, and Burns wished to be thought inspired. Wine was out of his reach; his muse found her themes among humble and familiar things, and it was his boast that Ferintosh could work intellectual wonders as well as Falernian. For others, he wished Parnassus a vineyard; but for himself, he preferred the banks of the Ayr or the Lugar to those of Helicon, and the blood of barley to that of the grape. When he had neither money to spend on liquor, nor health to relish it, he was chaunting songs in honour of tippling; putting himself down in the list of topers, and recording that whisky was the northern ambrosia, too good for all save gods or Scotsmen. This is not unlike the mad-

ness of Johnson from poverty, at College. In the case of Burns, there was something national as well as personal: whisky and ale are the offspring of the Scottish vales, and he preferred them to "dearthfu' wine or foreign gill." Liquor was not then, and I believe never was, a settled desire of soul with the Poet.

When Burns supposed that his "drunken rants" and nocturnal excursions among the lasses of Kyle, had made him

"——— Slander's common speech,
A text for infamy to preach,"

he found, to his surprise, that in another way he had won the approbation of certain ministers of the kirk of Scotland. How this came about may be briefly described. Calvinism, at that time, was agitated with a schism among its professors, and the factions were known in the west by the names of Old Light and New Light. The Old Light enthusiasts aspired to be ranked with the purest of the Covenanters; they patronized austerity of manners and humility of dress, and stigmatized much that the world loved, as things vain and unessential to salvation. The New Light countenanced no such self-denial; men were permitted to gallop on Sunday, to make merry and enjoy themselves; and women were indulged in the article of dress, and failings or follies were treated with mercy at least, if not indulgence. The former refused to lean on the slender reed of human works, thought a good deed savoured of selfishness, and that faith, and faith alone, was the light which led to heaven: the latter thought a cheerful heart was an

acceptable thing with God; that good works helped to make a good end, and that faith, and faith alone, was not religion, but a false light, which led to perdition. Like the writers in the late singular controversy on Art and Nature in poetry, the divines of the west of Scotland perhaps never concluded that faith and works were both essential to salvation, and that, in truth, Christianity required them. Each side thundered from the pulpit; their sermons partook of the character of curses, and their conversation in private life had the hue of controversy. Their parishioners, too, raised up their voices—for, in Scotland, the meanest peasant can be eloquent and puzzling on speculative theology — and the whole land rung with mystical discussions on effectual calling, free grace, and predestination, when Burns precipitated himself into the midst of the conflict.

The Poet sided with the New Light faction. For this several reasons may be assigned—he was not educated closely in the tenets of Calvinism; and his own good taste and sense taught him that faith without works was folly. His experience in church discipline, in the case of "Sonsie Bess," had not tended to increase his reverence for the Old Light professors, among whom "Daddie Auld," his parish pastor, was a leader. Moreover, Gavin Hamilton, of whom he held his land, was not only a New-light-ite, but a friend of the Poet, and a martyr in the cause of free-agency. We may add to all this, that the Poet naturally fell into the ranks of those who allowed greater liberty of speech, and a

wider longitude of morals. Perhaps the chiefs of the Old Light association would have regarded little an attack in prose, as to such missiles they were accustomed; but their new enemy assaulted them with a weapon against which the armour of dulness was no defence. He attacked and vanquished them with witty verse, much to the joy of the children of the New Light, and greatly to the amusement of the country.

Of the effect of these satiric attacks, the Poet himself gives an account to Moore :—"The first of my poetic offspring which saw the light was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them dramatis personae in my "Holy Fair." I had a notion myself that the piece had some merit; but to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it. but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause. 'Holy Willy's Prayer' next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery—if haply any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers." This is almost all that the Poet says of his satiric labours in aid of the New Light. The poem to which he first alludes is called "The Holy Tuilzie," and relates the bickering which arose between Moodie, minister of Riccarton, and Russel, minister of Kilmarnock—both children of the Old Light. The poetic merit of the piece is small; the personalities marked and strong.

"The Kirk's Alarm" is another of these compositions: amid much personality, and many allusions to past and passing matters, there are gleams of wit and poetry worthy of a less contracted subject. "The Ordination" succeeded, and is in a better vein. There is uncommon freedom of language and happiness of expression in almost every verse. The crowning satire of the whole is "Holy Willie's Prayer," a daring work, personal, poetical, and profane. The hero of the piece was a west-country pretender to superlative godliness; one of the Old Light faction; an elder of the kirk, who made himself busy in searching for faults in the flock. Burns first signalized him in an epitaph, in which he consigns him to reprobation, and then warns the devil that to lay his "nine-tailed cat" on such a contemptible delinquent would be little to his own credit. Then he makes Willie honestly confess his own backslidings, and explain predestination in a way that causes us to shudder as well as to smile:

"O Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,
For reasons best kent to thysel,
Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell,
A' for thy glory;
And no for either good or ill
They've done afore thee."

He next bethinks him of his own glory and errors; the latter, it is quite plain, he considers but as spots in the sun—specks in the cup of the cowslip. He claims praise in the singular, and acknowledges folly in the plural:—

"And sometimes, too, with worldly trust
Vile self gets in,
But Thou remembers we are dust,
Defiled in sin."

Nor can Burns be said to have overlooked his own interest; he compliments Hamilton of Mossgiel as one—

> "Who has so many taking arts,
> O'er great and sma,
> Frae God's ain priests the people's hearts
> He wiles awa."

In a similar strain of poetry and wit, he, in another poem of the same period, congratulates Goudie of Kilmarnock on his work respecting revealed religion. The reasoning and the learning of the essayist are slumbering with all forgotten things; but the verses they called into life are not fated soon to die:

> "O Goudie, terror of the Whigs,
> Dread of black coats and reverend wigs,
> Sour Bigotry on her last legs
> Girning looks back,
> Wishing the ten Egyptian plagues
> Would seize ye quick."

In after-life, the Poet seemed little inclined to remember the verses he composed on this ridiculous controversy; and I have heard that he was unwilling to talk about the subject. Perhaps he felt that he had launched the burning darts of verse against men of blameless lives, and honesty, and learning; that his muse had wasted some of her time on a barren and profitless topic, and had sung less from her own heart than for the gratification of others. Of all these poems, he admitted but the "Ordination" into his works, willing, it would seem, to let the rest die with the controvery which occasioned them. The New Light professors seemed to care little what sort of weapon they em-

ployed: the verse of Burns has two edges like a Highland sword, and Presbyterianism suffered as well as the Old Light. It is almost incredible that venerable clergymen applauded those profane sallies, learned them by heart, carried copies in their pockets, and quoted and recited them till they grew popular, and were on every lip. Even "Holy Willie's Prayer" was countenanced by the New Light pastors. Among the Poet's papers was found an epistle to the Rev. John MacMath, enclosing a copy of the Prayer which he had requested; the date of this communication, 17th September, 1785, fixes the season of this western dispute. It seems, however, to approach the close; the Poet is grown weary of his work, as well he might:

> "My Musie, tired with many a sonnet,
> On gown and band and douce black bonnet,
> Is grown right eerie now she's done it,
> Lest they should blame her,
> And rouse their holy thunder on it,
> And anathem her."

Burns, during this drudgery, was strengthening his hands for higher and purer duties. In labouring to accommodate his thoughts, and

> "Riving the words to gar them clink"

in unison with the technicalities of mystical controversy, he was acquiring an almost audacious vigour of expression, and a ready skill in handling subjects either of fact or of fancy. It is true that he learned to speak profanely, but then this was in the service of the kirk; he learned something more when he dined with drunken lawyers, and grew tipsy among godly priests. The muse of Kyle

helped to extinguish the Old Light, but she left predestination where she found it. A Mauchline mason said to the Poet, when he read him "Holy Willie's Prayer," "It's a' very weel and very witty, and I have laughed that shouldna have laughed; but ye'll no hinder me from thinking that Providence kend weel what he was doing when he made man—foresaw the upshot—wha was to be good and wha was to be bad; and knowing this, and making man a fallible creature still, looks as like predestination as ought I ever heard of."

These satiric rhymes established the fame of Burns in his native place: his company was now courted by country lairds, village lawyers, and parish schoolmasters, and by all persons who had education above common, or kept some state in their households. He was always welcome to Gavin Hamilton and his family; equally so to Robert Aiken, a worthy writer in Ayr; and now he became so to all who had any relish for wit or any soul for poetry. He was at once the companion of the grave and of the giddy; now dining with the minister and a douce friend or two at the manse; then presiding in a Mason meeting, chaunting songs, and pushing about the punch with the "brethren of the mystic level," or communing on the severity of the excise laws with a "blackguard smuggler," or some highland envoy from the dominions of Ferintosh, whose "cousin did as good as keep a small still." When he appeared in company he was expected to say something clever or shrewd; he was pointed out at church and at market, and peasant spoke of him to peasant as a

wild, witty lad, who lived at Mossgiel, and had all the humour of Ramsay, and more than the spirit of Fergusson.

It is humiliating to think that works which Burns seemed willing to forget brought him first into notice. Some of the most exquisite lyrics ever said or sung failed to do for him what "The Holy Tuilzie" and "The Kirk's Alarm" accomplished at once; and there can be no question that "Holy Willie's Prayer" and the "Epistle to Goudie" prepared the minds of the people around him for admiring his "Halloween" and his "Cottar's Saturday Night." In truth, poetry, which only embodies sentiments and feelings common to our nature, cannot compete in the race of immediate fame with verse appealing to our passions and our prejudices, and glowing with the heat of a passing dispute. Time settles and explains all. The true Florimel is found to be of delicate flesh and blood, breathing of loveliness and attraction, and adorned by nature; while the False Duessa is discovered to be a thing of shreds and patches, with jewels of glass, and an artificial complexion. Nature and truth finally triumph, and to nature and truth Burns accordingly returned. He left the agitated puddles of mysticism to drink at the pure springs with the muse of love, and joy, and patriotism.

Of the person and manners of the Poet, at this important period of his life, we have various accounts; but the portraits, though differing in posture as well as in light and shade, all express the same sentiment. He was now grown up to man's estate, and had taken his station as such in society;

he was the head, too, of his father's house, and though his expenses were regulated upon a system of close economy, his bargains as a farmer, controlled by his brother Gilbert, and his demeanour at the fireside under the mild influence of his mother, he had in all other matters his own will. He has recorded much of himself at this period both in verse and prose, nor can this be set down to egotism; from all the world, save the little community of Kyle, he was completely shut out, and he turned his eyes on himself, and wrote down his own hopes and aspirations. He has even recorded his stature in rhyme:—

"O! why the deuce should I repine,
Or be an ill foreboder?
I'm twenty-three, and five feet nine—
I'll go and be a sodger."

His large dark expressive eyes; his swarthy visage; his broad brow, shaded with black curly hair; his melancholy look, and his well-knit frame, vigorous and active—all united to draw men's eyes upon him. He affected, too, a certain oddity of dress and manner. He was clever in controversy; but obstinate, and even fierce, when contradicted, as most men are who have built up their opinions for themselves. He used with much taste the common pithy saws and happy sayings of his country, and invigorated his eloquence by apt quotations from old songs or ballads. He courted controversy, and it was to this period that Murdoch, the accomplished mechanic, referred, when he told me that he once heard Burns haranguing his fellow-peasants on religion at the door of a change-

house, and so unacceptable were his remarks that some old men hissed him away. Nor must it be supposed that, even when listened to, he was always victorious.—" Burns, sir," said one of his old opponents, " was a 'cute chield and a witty, but he didna half like to have my harrow coming owre his new-fangled notions."

The early companions of the Poet were men above the common mark. Smith, to whom he addresses some of his finest poetic epistles, was a person of taste and sagacity; David Sillar, a good scholar, and something of a poet; Ranken, an outspoken, ready-witted man, and a little of a scoffer; Lapraik lived at a distance—he had written at least one song worthy of notice. Hamilton was open-hearted and open-handed, and of a good family; Aiken seems to have abounded in good sense and good feeling; Ballantyne was much of a gentleman; Parker, kind and generous; Mackenzie, of Irvine, a skilful surgeon and a good scholar, who introduced the Poet to Whiteford, Erskine, and Blair;—but his chief comrade and confidante was his brother Gilbert, who at an early age distinguished himself for sense and discernment.

" Gilbert," says Mackenzie, " partook more of the manner and appearance of the father, and Robert of the mother. In the first interview I had with him at Lochlea, he was frank, modest, well-informed, and communicative. The Poet seemed distant, suspicious, and without any wish to interest or please. He kept himself very silent in a dark corner of the room, and before he took any part in conversation, I

frequently observed him scrutinizing me, while I conversed with his father and his brother. From the period of which I speak, I took a lively interest in Robert Burns. Even then his conversation was rich in well chosen figures, animated and energetic. Indeed, I have always thought that no person could have a just idea of the extent of Burns' talents, who had not heard him converse. His discrimination of character was greatly beyond that of any person I ever knew, and I have often observed to him that it seemed to be intuitive. I seldom ever knew him make a false estimate of character, when he formed the opinion from his own observation."

The sketch drawn by Sillar is of another kind:— "Robert Burns was some time in the parish of Tarbolton, prior to my acquaintance with him. His social disposition easily procured him acquaintance; but a certain satirical seasoning with which he and all poetical geniuses are in some degree influenced, while it set the rustic circle in a roar, was not unaccompanied with suspicious fear. I recollect hearing his neighbours observe he had a great deal to say for himself, and that they suspected his principles. He wore the only tied hair in the parish; and in the church his plaid, which was of a particular colour (I think fillemot), he wrapped in a peculiar manner round his shoulders. These surmises and his exterior made me solicitous of his acquaintance. I was introduced by Gilbert not only to his brother, but to the whole of that family, where, in a short time, I became a frequent, and, I believe, not un-

welcome visitant. After the commencement of my acquaintance with the bard, we frequently met upon Sundays at church; when, between sermons, instead of going with our friends or lasses to the inn, we often took a walk in the fields. In these walks, I have often been struck with his facility in addressing the fair sex; and many times when I have been bashfully anxious how to express myself, he would have entered into conversation with them with the greatest ease and freedom; and it was generally a death-blow to our conversation, however agreeable, to meet a female acquaintance. Some of the few opportunities of a noontide walk that a country life allows her laborious sons, he spent on the banks of the river, or in the woods in the neighbourhood of Stair. Some book or other he always carried and read when not otherwise employed; it was likewise his custom to read at table."

A third hand completes the sketch:—"Though Burns," says Professor Walker, "was still unknown as a Poet, he already numbered several clergymen among his acquaintance: one of these communicated to me a circumstance which conveyed more forcibly than many words, an idea of the impression made upon his mind by the powers of the Poet. This gentleman had repeatedly met Burns in company, when the acuteness and originality displayed by the latter, the depth of his discernment, the force of his expressions, and the authoritative energy of his understanding, had created in the former a sense of his power, of the extent of which he was unconscious till revealed to him by accident. The second

time that he appeared in the pulpit, he came with an assured and tranquil mind; and though a few persons of education were present, he advanced some length in the service, with his confidence and self-possession unimpaired. But when he observed Burns, who was of a different parish, unexpectedly enter the church, he was instantly affected with a tremour and embarrassment which apprized him of the impression his mind, unknown to itself, had previously received."

Authorities such as these confute the inconsiderate assertions of Heron, respecting the "opening character" of the Poet. We have no proof that he became discontented in early life with the humble labours to which he saw himself confined, and with the poor subsistence he was able to earn by them—that he could not help looking upon the rich and great whom he saw around, with an emotion between envy and contempt, as if something had still whispered to his heart that there was injustice in the external inequality between his fate and theirs. The early injuries of fortune oppressed him at times; but, till he was thirty years' old, his spirit was buoyant and unbroken, and he looked with an unclouded brow on the world around him.

In "the Holy Fair," the Poet, accidentally or purposely, rose out of the lower regions of personal invective into the purer air of true poetry, and gave us a picture of singular breadth and beauty. The aim of the poem is chiefly to reprehend, by means of wit and humour, those almost indecent festivities which, in many western parishes, accompany the

administration of the sacrament. Instead of preaching to the staid and the pious under the roof of the kirk, the scene is transferred to the open churchyard, where a tent or pulpit is erected for the preachers; while, all around, the people of the parish seat themselves on graves or grave-stones, decorously to look and listen. In the earlier days of the church, when men were more in earnest, there is no doubt that a scene such as this in the open air was attended with nothing of an objectionable nature; nay, at present, the thoughtful and the serious contemplate it as something edifying and impressive; but with the pious and the orderly come swarms of the idle and the profligate; bevies of lads and lasses keep moving about in search of better seats or finer points of view, and tiring, or affecting to tire, of the sermon, which is sometimes of the longest, retire to a neighbouring change-house, or to the open door of an ale-booth, where, as they empty the glass, they may hear the voice of the preacher. There is no doubt that these "Holy Fairs," as they were scoffingly called, afforded scenes more than justifying serious as well as sarcastic reproof. In the poem, Burns here and there shews he had been reading other poets. His allegorical personages are partly copied from Fergusson, and the hares that hirpled down the furs did the same for Montgomery. "The farcical scene the Poet there describes," says Gilbert, "was often a favourite field for his observation, and most of the incidents he mentions had actually passed before his eyes."

Burns now openly took upon himself the name of

Poet; he not only wrote it in his books, but wrought it into his rhymes, and began to entertain hopes of distinction in the realms of song. But nothing, perhaps, marks the character of the man more than the alteration which he made in his own name. He had little relish for by-gone things; there are few gazings back at periods of honour or of woes in all his strains. The name he had hitherto borne was of old standing, the Poet sat in judgment upon it, concluded that it had a barbarous sound, and threw away Burness—a name two syllables long, and fifteen centuries old, and adopted that of Burns in its stead. Had his father been alive, this might not have happened. On the 20th of March, 1786, he says to one of his Correspondents :—" I hope some time before we hear the gouk, to have the pleasure of seeing you at Kilmarnock, when I intend having a gill between us in a mutchkin stoup, which will be a great comfort and consolation to, dear Sir, your humble servant, Robert Burness."—This is the latest time that I find his original name in his own hand-writing; it is plain that, up to this period, he imagined he had achieved nothing under that of his father deserving to live.

Burns commenced emblazoning his altered name with all that is bright and lasting in verse. From the day that he entered upon Mossgiel with the resolution of becoming rich, till the dark hour on which he quitted it, reduced well nigh to beggary, he continued to pour forth poem after poem, and song succeeding song, with a variety and rapidity truly wonderful. His best poems are the offspring of

those four unfortunate years, and the history of each has something in it of the curious or the romantic. "The Death and dying words of Poor Mailie," and, better still, "Poor Mailie's Elegy," were written before the death of his father—at least the former was. The Poet had, it seems, bought a ewe with two lambs from a neighbour, and tethered her in a field at Lochlea. "He and I," says Gilbert, "were going out with our teams, and our two younger brothers to drive for us, at mid-day, when Hugh Wilson, a curious-looking awkward boy, clad in plaiding, came to us with much anxiety in his face, with the information that the ewe had entangled herself in the tether, and was lying in the ditch."

The "Elegy" has much of the Poet's latter freedom and force. He had caressed this four-footed favourite till she followed at his heels like a dog:—

"Through a' the town she trotted by him,
A lang half mile she could descry him,
Wi' kindly bleat, when she did spy him,
She ran wi' speed;
A friend mair faithfu' ne'er came nigh him,
Than Mailie dead."

One of the rejected verses ought to be remembered in Kyle, were it but for the honour done to the lambs of Fairlee:—

"She was nae get o' runted rams,
Wi' woo like goats, an' legs like trams,
She was the flower o' Fairlee lambs,
Of famous breed;
Now Robin greetin chews the hams
O' Mailie dead."

The image in the two last lines is out of harmony with the sentiment of the poem; and Burns, whose taste was born with him, omitted the verse in consequence.

The "Epistle to David Sillar" was written some time in the summer of 1784. Burns was in the habit of composing verse at the plough or the harrows :—he turned it over in his mind for several days, and when he had polished it to his satisfaction, or found a moment's leisure, committed it to paper. Gilbert relates that he was weeding with Robert in the kaleyard, when he repeated the principal part of the Epistle. The first idea of his becoming an author was then started. "I was much pleased," says his brother, "with the Epistle, and said to him that I was of opinion it would bear being printed, and that it would be well received by people of taste ; that I thought it at least equal, if not superior, to many of Allan Ramsay's epistles, and that the merit of these, and much other Scotch poetry, seemed to consist principally in the knack of the expression ; but here there was a train of interesting sentiment, and the Scotticism of the language scarcely seemed affected, but appeared to be the natural language of the poet ; that, besides, there was certainly some novelty in a poet pointing out the consolations that were in store for him when he should go a-begging. Robert seemed pleased with my criticism, and we talked of sending it to some magazine."

If we credit the accuracy of the verse, and the memory of Gilbert, the Poet was, in 1784, acquainted with Jean Armour, and her admirer and lover. It is more likely that the verse in which her name occurs was added afterwards, unless we believe that he had made an inroad among the "Mauchline

belles," almost as soon as he went to Mossgiel. His epistles are of high merit. They are perhaps the finest compositions of the kind in the language—airy, elegant, and philosophic—with more nature than Prior's Epistle to "Fletwood Shepherd," and equal power of illustration. He had already begun to take those serious looks at human life of which his poems are full; nor did he fail to perceive how unequally the gifts of fortune, as well as those of genius, are divided.

> " Its hardly in a body's power
> To keep at times from being sour,
> To see how things are shared;
> How best o' chiels are whiles in want,
> While coofs on countless thousands rant,
> And kenna how to wair't."

He lived long enough to think more deeply and more darkly on this topic. At present the world was brightening before him—the mist seemed rolling away from his path, and he felt disposed to enjoy life without murmuring.

The epistolary form was a favourite way with Burns of giving air to his opinions and feelings; when he had doubts of fame—was o'ermastered with his passions—or disgusted with

> " The tricks of knaves and fash of fools."

he lifted the pen and indited an epistle to a friend, and poured out the loves, the cares, the sorrows, the joys, the hopes, and fears of the passing moment. It is truly wonderful with what ease and felicity—nay, with what elegance, he twines the garlands of his fancy round a barren topic. Much of his history may be sought for in these compositions. In his

"Epistle to Smith," he alludes to his Poems: intimates that he had thoughts of printing them, pretends to take alarm at the sight of moths revelling on the pages of authors:—

"Far seen in Greek, deep men of letters,"

and philosophically exclaims as well as poetically—

"Then farewell hopes of laurel boughs
To garland my poetic brows;
Henceforth I'll rove where busy ploughs
Are whistling thrang,
And teach the lonely heights and howes
My rustic sang."

Burns takes a loftier view of the matter in his epistle to Lapraik, written on the first of April, 1785. He intimates that he is no poet in the high acceptation of the word; but a rhymer, who deals in homely words, and has no pretence to learning. He pulls himself down, but he refuses to let any one else up; he prefers a spark of nature's fire to all the artificial heat of education, and speaks contemptuously of "critic folk," and learned judges.

"What's a' your jargon o' your schools,
Your Latin names for horns and stools?
If honest Nature made you fools
What sairs your grammars?
Ye'd better ta'en up spades and shools,
Or knappin-hammers.

"A set o' dull, conceited hashes,
Confuse their brains in College classes,
They gang in stirks, and come out asses,
Plain truth to speak;
And syne they think to climb Parnassus
By dint o' Greek."

In a second epistle to the same person, Burns claims for "the ragged followers of the Nine" a life of immortal light, and presents to their contemplation

the sordid sons of Mammon suffering under the transmigration of souls.

> "Though here they scrape, and squeeze, and growl,
> Their worthless neivefu' of a soul
> May in some future carcase howl,
> The forest's fright:
> Or in some day-detesting owl
> May shun the light."

In a poetic letter to another of his companions while exulting in the idea of making the rivers and rivulets of Kyle flow bright in future song, he lets us into the secret of his own mode of musing:—

> "The Muse, nae poet ever fand her,
> Till by himsel' he learned to wander
> Adown some trotting burn's meander,
> An' no think lang!
> O! sweet to stray, an' pensive ponder
> A heartfelt sang!"

Of these poems we are informed that the first epistle to John Lapraik was written in consequence of a clever song which that indifferent rhymer had made under the inspiration of adversity. The epistle to Ranken carries its own explanation with it: we may allow it to remain concealed in the thin mist of allegory. The epistle to Smith is perhaps the very best of all these compositions: the singular ease of the verse; the moral dignity of one passage; the wit and humour of a second; the elegance of compliment in a third; and the life which animates the whole, must be felt by the most ordinary mind. One of the verses was frequent on the lips of Byron during the darkening down of his own day:—

> "When ance life's day draws near the gloamin,
> Then farewell vacant, careless roamin,
> And farewell cheerful tankard's foamin,
> An' social noise;
> And farewell, dear deluding woman,
> The joy of joys."

In the winter of 1785, Burns composed his "Address to the Deil." His sable majesty is familiar to the imagination of every Scottish peasant, and there are few wild glens in which he has not been heard or seen. The Satan of Milton was a favourite with the Poet; he admired his fortitude in enduring what could not be remedied, and pitied a noble and exalted mind in ruins. This feeling he united to the traditions of shepherds and husbandmen, and treated the Evil Spirit with much of the respect due to fallen royalty. "It was, I think," says Gilbert, "in the winter, as we were going together with carts for coal to the family fire, and I could yet point out the particular spot, that the author first repeated to me the 'Address to the Deil.'" That Burns was now acquainted with Jean Armour the variations of this poem sufficiently prove:—

"Lang syne, in Eden's happy scene,
When strappin, Adam's days were green,
And Eve was like my bonny Jean,
My dearest part,
A dancing, sweet, young, handsome quean,
Wi' guileless heart."

The evil spirit of religious controversy was now fairly out of him: he makes no allusions, though the temptation was great, to the clergy, but treats the subject with natural truth and vigour. All northern natures sympathize in the following fine stanza:—

"I've heard my reverend graunie say
In lanely glens ye like to stray,
Or where auld ruined castles gray
Nod to the moon,
Ye fright the nightly wanderers way
Wi' eldritch croon."

There is something of serious jocularity in the verse which expresses the Poet's fears and hopes of futurity:—

> "An' now, auld Cloots, I ken yere thinkin'
> A certain Bardie's rantin', drinkin',
> Some luckless hour will send him linkin'
> To your black pit;
> But faith! he'll turn a corner, jinkin',
> And cheat you yet."

In the contemplated repentance of Satan, Burns seems to hint at universal redemption—a finishing touch of fine and unexpected tenderness.

The "Halloween" is a happy mixture of the dramatic and the descriptive, and bears the impress of the manners, customs, and superstitions of the people. We see the scene, and are made familiar with the actors; we not only see them busied in the mysteries of the night, but we hear their remarks; nor can we refrain from accompanying them on their solitary and perilous errands to "winnow wechts of naething, sow hemp-seed, pull kale-stocks, eat apples at the glass;" or, more romantic still, "wet the left sleeve of the shirt where three lairds' lands meet at a burn." The whole poem hovers between the serious and the ludicrous: in delineating the superstitious beliefs and mysterious acts of the evening, Burns keeps his own opinion to himself. The scene is laid in the last night of harvest, as the name implies, at a husbandman's fireside, whose corn is gathered into the stack-yard and the barn; and the hands which aided in the labour are met—

> "To burn their nits, and pou their stocks,
> An' haud their Halloween."

They seem not unaware that while they are merry,

or looking into futurity, fairies are dancing on Cassilis-Downans, and witches are mounted on their "ragweed nags," hurrying to some wild rendezvous, or concerting with the author of mischief fresh woes for man. It is the most equal of all the Poet's compositions.

A singular poem, and in its nature personal, was also the offspring of the same year. This is "Death and Doctor Hornbook." The hero of the piece was John Wilson, schoolmaster of the parish of Tarbolton: a person of blameless life, fond of argument, opinionative, and obstinate. At a mason-meeting, it seems he provoked the Poet by questioning some of his positions in a speech stuffed with Latin phrases and allusions to pharmacy. The future satire dawned on Burns at the moment, for he exclaimed twice, "Sit down, Doctor Hornbook!" On his way home he seated himself on the parapet of a bridge near "Willie's Mill," and in the moonlight began to reflect on what had passed. It then occurred to him that Wilson had added to the moderate income of his school the profit arising from the sale of a few common medicines; this suggested an interview with "Death," and all the ironical commendations of the Dominie which followed. He composed the poem on his perilous seat, and when he had done, fell asleep; he was awakened by the rising sun, and, on going home, committed it to paper. It exhibits a singular union of fancy and humour; the attention is arrested at once by the difficulty felt in counting the horns of the moon, and we expect something to happen when his sha-

dowy majesty comes upon the stage, relates his experience in "nicking the thread and choking the breath," and laments how his scythe and dart are rendered useless by the skill of Dr. Hornbook. On the appearance of the poem, Wilson found the laugh of Kyle too much for him—

"The weans held out their fingers laughin."

So he removed to Glasgow, where he engaged with success in other pursuits. He lives, but loves no one the better for naming the name of the Poet, or making any allusion to the poem. Burns repeated the satire to his brother during the afternoon of the day on which it was composed. "I was holding the plough," said Gilbert, "and Robert was letting the water off the field beside me."

The patriotic feelings of the Bard were touched when he took up the song of "Scotch Drink" against the government of the day, and uttered his "Earnest cry and prayer to the Scottish representatives in the House of Commons." Yet bitter as he sometimes is, and overflowing with humorous satire, these poems abound with natural and noble images; nay, he scolds himself into a pleasant mood, and scatters praise on the "chosen Five-and-Forty," with much skill and discrimination. His praise of whiskey is strangely mingled with sadness:

"Food fills the wame and keeps us livin';
Though life's a gift no worth receivin'
When heavy dragged wi' pine an' grievin',
But, oil'd by thee,
The wheels o' life gae down hill scrievin',
Wi' rattlin' glee.

"Thou clears the head o' doited Lear,
Thou cheers the heart o' droopin' Care,

Thou strings the nerves o' Labour sair,
At 's weary toil;
Thou even brightens dark Despair
Wi' gloomy smile."

A country forge with a blazing fire, an anxious blacksmith, and a welding-heat, will rise to the fancy readily on reading these inimitable stanzas :—

" When Vulcan gies his bellows breath,
And ploughmen gather wi' their graith,
O rare to see thee fizz an' freath
I' the luggit caup,
Then *Burnewin* comes on like death
At every chap.

" Nae mercy then for airn or steel,
The brawnie, bainie ploughman chiel
Brings hard owrehip, wi' sturdy wheel,
The strong forehammer,
Till block an' study ring an' reel
Wi' dinsome clamour."

Nor is there wanting stanzas of a more solemn kind to bring trembling to our mirth. The Scotsman dying on a battle-field with the sound of victory in his ear, is a noble picture :—

" Nae cauld faint-hearted doubtings tease him,
Death comes !—wi' fearless eye he sees him,
Wi' bloody hand a welcome gies him,
An' when he fa's
His latest draught o' breathin' lea'es him
In faint huzzas."

He steps at once from the serious to the comic : his description of Mother Scotland sitting on her mountain throne, her diadem a little awry, her eyes reeling, and the heather below becoming moist during her prolonged libations, is equally humorous and irreverent. Those who may suspect that all this singing about liquor arose from a love of it, will be glad to hear that when Nanse Tinnoch was told that Burns proposed to toast the Scotch members in her house

"nine times a week," she exclaimed, "Him drink in my house! I hardly ken the colour o' his coin."

The year 1785 was a harvest-season of verse with Burns. Some of his poems he hesitated for a while to make public; others he copied, and scattered amongst his friends. Of these one of the most remarkable is "The Jolly Beggars." This drama, which I cannot help considering the most varied and characteristic of the Poet's works, was unknown, save to some west country acquaintances, till after his death, when it came unexpectedly out. The opening seems uttered by another muse than Coila — the sound is of the elder days of verse; but the moment the curtain draws up and shows the actors, the spirit of Burns appears kindling and animating all. It is impossible to deny his presence:—

"First niest the fire in auld red rags
Ane sat, weel braced wi' mealy bags,
And knapsack a' in order;
His doxy lay within his arm,
Wi' usquebae an' blankets warm,
She blinkit on her sodger.

"And aye he gied the tosie drab
The tither skelpin kiss,
While she held up her greedy gab
Just like an amous dish,
Ilk smack still, did crack still,
Like to a cudger's whup,
While staggering and swaggering
He roared this ditty up."

The scene of this rustic drama lies in Mauchline, and the actors are strolling vagrants, who having acquired meal and money by begging, pilfering, and slight-of-hand, assemble in Posie Nansie's to "toom their pocks and pawn their duds," and

"Gie ae night's discharge to care,"

over the gill-stoup and the quaigh. They hold a sort of Beggars' Saturday-night—sing songs, utter sentiments, and lay down the loose laws of the various classes they represent. The characters are numerous. The maimed soldier, who bore scars both for Scotland and for love; and his doxy, warm with blankets and usquebaugh, who in her youth forsook the sword for the sake of the church, but returned to the drum when age brought reflection. The merry-andrew, who would venture his neck for liquor, who held love to be the half of his craft, and yet was a fool still;—the highland dame who had lightened many a purse—been ducked in many a well; who, with a countryman, had laid the land under contribution from Tweed to Spey, and was only hindered from making a foray farther south by the interposition of the "waefu' woodie!" The pigmy scraper wi' his fiddle;—the sturdy tinker, who had "travelled round all Christian ground" in his vocation, and swore by all was swearing worth whenever he was moved;—and, last of all, the "wight of Homer's craft," who, though lame of a foot, had three wives, and could allure the people round him in crowds when he sung of love and country revelry. All these, and more, sing and shout, and talk and act in character; and unite in giving effect to the chorus of a song which claims, for the jovial ragged ring, exemption from the cares which weigh down the sedate and the orderly, and a happiness which refuses to wait on the train-attended carriage, or on the

sober bed of matrimony. The curtain drops as they all shout,

> "A fig for those by law protected,
> Liberty's a glorious feast,
> Courts for cowards were erected,
> Churches built to please the priest."

There is nothing in the language which, for life and character, approaches this singular "cantata." The Beggar's Opera is a burial compared to it; it bears some resemblance to the Wallenstein's Camp of Schiller, as translated by Lord Francis Leveson Gower; the same variety, and the same licence of action and speech distinguish both.

The origin of the cantata is worth relating. Mauchline ale and Mauchline maidens frequently brought the Poet from Mossgiel, which lies but some half-a-mile distant. He frequented the public-house of John Dow on those occasions, in the immediate vicinity of the scene of "The Jolly Beggars." The house of Posie Nansie, *alias* Agnes Gibson, stands opposite nearly to the church-yard gate. One night it happened that Smith of Mauchline, and Burns, on their way up the street, heard the sound of "meikle fun and jokin'" in Nansie's hostelry, and saw lights streaming from the fractured windows. On entering, they found a company of wandering mendicants enjoying themselves over the dear keilbagie. They were welcomed with cheers, entered into the humours of the scene, called for more liquor, and the noise and fun grew fast and furious. Burns paid much attention to an old soldier with a "wooden arm and leg," whose drollery was unbounded. In a few days he rough-wrote the cantata, and shewed it

amongst his friends. He gave the only copy now known to be in existence to David Woodburn; it is at present in the hands of Thomas Stewart of Greenock.

It is probable that the Poet found it an easier task to delineate the characters and indite the songs of the Cantata than to endow the "Mouse" and the "Daisy" with sentiments of terror and of pity. A common ploughman would have stamped his tacketed shoe upon the one, saying "down, vermin!" or helped the furrow over upon the other, pronouncing it a weed. With far other feelings the ploughman of Mossgiel saw the ruin of the one, and the destruction of the other. "The verses to the Mouse and the Mountain Daisy," says Gilbert, "were composed on the occasions, and while the author was holding the plough. I could point out the particular spot where each was composed. Holding the plough was a favourite situation with Robert for poetic compositions, and some of his best verses were produced while he was at that exercise. Several of the poems were written for the purpose of bringing forward some favourite sentiment of the author." When the coulter passed through the nest of leaves and stubble, the Poet assured the timid mouse, as it fled in terror, that the best laid schemes of men were frustrated, as well as those of mice; and that though its house was laid in ruins, and winter afforded no materials for constructing a new one, still its lot was bliss compared with his own. It was touched only with the passing, while he was affected with the past—felt the present, and dreaded the

future. A similar train of sentiment runs through the "Daisy:" the Poet buries its opening bloom with the plough, and grieves that he cannot save a thing so lovely; nay, lest the flower should mistake the crash of the cruel coulter for the pressure of some gentler thing, he exclaims, with equal tenderness and beauty:—

"Alas! it's no thy neebor sweet,
The bonnie lark, companion meet,
Bending thee 'mang the dewy weet
Wi' spreckled breast,
When upward springing blythe to greet
The purpling east."

He suddenly turns from the fate of the flower to his own, and draws the same dark conclusions as he did in the "Mouse;"

"Even thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,
That fate is thine no distant date,
Stern Ruin's ploughshare drives elate
Full on thy bloom;
Till, crush'd beneath the furrow's weight,
Shall be thy doom."

His poetry abounds in melancholy predictions about himself; he had visions of beauty and of grandeur, but along with them came darker visions: want and ruin, sorrow and neglect, death and the grave.

The fine poem of "Man was made to Mourn" was composed by Burns for the purpose of bringing forward a favourite sentiment.—"He used to remark to me," says Gilbert, "that he could not well conceive a more mortifying picture of human life than a man seeking work. In casting about in his mind how this sentiment might be illustrated, the elegy of 'Man was made to Mourn' was composed." The germ of the composition may be found in "The Life and Age of Man," which the Poet's

mother was wont to sing to his grand-uncle. The same sentiment is common to both; the same form of expression, and the same words, may be traced in every verse; "Man is made to mourn," is the introductory exclamation of the old; "Man was made to mourn," is the chorus of the new. Nor is the earlier poem without pathos and force; the periods of man's life are compared to the months of the year: the child is born in January, flourishes in July, and dies in December; the parallel is well maintained:—

"Then cometh May, gallant and gay,
When fragrant flowers do thrive,
The child is then become a man,
Of age twentie-and-five.

"December fell, both sharp and snell,
Makes flowers creep to the ground;
Then man's threescore, both sick and sore,
No soundness in him found."

To make each month of the year correspond with five years of a man's life, the moralizing bard of the year sixteen hundred and fifty-three extinguished the faculties of man at sixty; the bard of seventeen hundred and eighty-six says nothing of life's duration, but sings the sorrows of him who, overwrought and abject, has to beg leave to toil from a lordly fellow-worm, who scorns his poor petition, and turns him over to idleness and woe. The question which the Poet asks is one not easily answered by the oppressor:—

"If I'm designed yon lordling's slave,
By Nature's law designed,
Why was an independent wish
E'er planted in my mind?
If not, why am I subject to
His cruelty or scorn?
Or why has man the will and power
To make his fellow mourn?"

The sage of the banks of Ayr intimates to the indignant bard that a future state, where the great and the wealthy cease from troubling, is the only hope and refuge of those—"who weary laden mourn." His own desolate condition and dreary prospects raised those darksome ideas.

In the truly noble poem of the "Vision" Burns imagines himself seated, in a winter night, by his fire, which burns reluctantly; weary with the flail, he proceeds to muse on wasted time. In his sight the scene is dark enough; he has spent the prime of youth in making rhymes for fools to sing; he has neglected advice which would have placed him at the head of a market; and now, "half-mad, half-fed, half-sarket," he is sitting undistinguished and poor. Stung with these reflections, he starts up, and is about to swear to refrain rhyme till his latest breath, when the door opens, the fire flames brighter, and a strange and lovely lady comes blushing to his side:—

"Green, slender, leaf-clad holly boughs,
Were twisted graceful round her brows;
I took her for some Scottish muse
By that same token,
And come to stop those reckless vows
Wou'd soon been broken."

His surmise was just: she was the Muse of Kyle—his own inspirer; nay, she had a handsome leg like his Mauchline Jean, and looked the express image of his own mind:—

"A hair-brained, sentimental trace,
Was strongly marked in her face,
A wildly witty rustic grace
Shone full upon her;
Her eye even turned on empty space,
Beam'd keen with honour."

On her mantle were pictured the district and heroes of Kyle; but she came to speak, and not to be looked at. She claimed Burns for her own bard; told him to lament his luckless lot no longer; that he was there to fulfil the social plan of Nature, and form a not unimportant link in the great chain of being. She was intimate with all his outgoings. Her words are useful to the biographer; they exhibit the Poet in his studious moods :—

"I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
Delighted with the dashing roar,
Or when the North his fleecy store
Drove through the sky;
I saw grim Nature's visage hoar
Struck thy young eye."

She observed, too, that beauty agitated his frame—communicated to his tongue words of persuasion and grace, and inspired him with musical and voluntary numbers : she saw more—

"I saw thy pulses maddening play
Wild send thee Pleasure's devious way,
Misled by Fancy's meteor ray,
By passion driven—
But yet the light that led astray
Was light from heaven."

His visitor assured him that the wealth of Potosi, or the regard of monarchs, could not at all equal the pleasure he would feel as a rustic poet, and entreated him to fan the tuneful flame, preserve his dignity, and trust for protection to the universal plan of the Creator :—

"'And wear thou this,' she solemn said,
And bound the holly round my head;
The polish'd leaves and berries red
Did rustling play,
And like a passing thought she fled
In light away."

Frequent bursts of religious feeling and a fine spirit of morality, are visible in much that Burns wrote; yet only one of his poems is expressly dedicated to devotion—"The Cottar's Saturday Night." The origin of this noble strain is related by his brother:—"Robert had frequently remarked to me that he thought there was something peculiarly venerable in the phrase, 'Let us worship God,' used by a decent sober head of a family introducing family worship. The hint of the plan and title of the poem were taken from Fergusson's 'Farmer's Ingle.' When Robert had not some pleasure in view, in which I was not thought fit to participate, we used frequently to walk together when the weather was favourable on the Sunday afternoon, those precious breathing times to the labouring part of the community, and enjoyed such Sundays as would make us regret to see their number abridged. It was in one of these walks that I first had the pleasure of hearing the Author repeat the 'Cottar's Saturday Night.'"

The poem is a picture of cottage devotion, by a hand more solicitous about accuracy than effect; for no one knew better than Burns that invention could not heighten, nor art embellish a scene in which man holds intercourse with heaven. His natural good taste told him that his work-day burning impetuosity of language and intrepid freedom of illustration were unsuitable here; he calmed down his style into an earnest and touching simplicity, which has been mistaken by critics for tameness; but the strength of the poem is proved by the numerous and

beautiful images, all of a devotional character, which it impresses on the mind. Religion is the leading feature of the whole; but love in its virgin state, and patriotism in its purity, mingle with it, and give a gentle tinge, rather than a decided colour, to the performance. The scene is peculiar to Scotland. With what natural art the Poet introduces us to the cottar, and to his happy home, and gradually prepares us, by a succession of solemn images, for the opening of the bible and the pouring out of prayer!

The winter day is darkening into night, the blackening trains of crows seek the pine-tree tops, and the toil-worn cottar lays together his spades and hoes, and, "hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend," walks homewards over the moor:—

"At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
The expectant wee-things todlin' stacher through,
To meet their dad wi' flichterin' noise an' glee.
His wee bit ingle blinkin bonnilie,
His clean hearth stane, his thrifty wifie's smile,
The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil."

Presently the elder children, released by Saturday night from their weekly servitude among the neighbouring farmers, come "drapping in;" and Jenny, their eldest hope, now woman grown, shews a "braw new gown," or puts her wages into her parents' hands, to aid them, should they require it. Amid them the anxious mother sits, and with her needle and shears,

"Gaurs auld claes look amaist as weel as new,
The father mixes all with admonition due."

The admonition of this good man to his children is, to be obedient to those above them; to mind their

labours, nor be idle when unobserved; and chiefly to fear the Lord, and duly, morn and night, implore his aid and counsel. While this is going on, a gentle rap is heard at the door, and a strappan youth, who "takes the mother's e'e," is introduced by Jenny as a neighbour lad, who, among other things, had undertaken to see her safely home. The visit is well taken, for he is neither wild nor worthless, but come of honest parents, and is, moreover, blate and bashful, and for inward joy can scarce behave himself. The mother knows well what makes him so grave; the father converses about horses and ploughs, while the supper-table is spread, and milk from her only cow, and a "well-hained cheese," of a peculiar flavour, and a twelvemonth old "sin' lint was in the bell," are placed by the frugal and happy mother before the lothful stranger.

"The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face
They round the ingle form a circle wide,
The sire turns o'er, wi' patriarchal grace,
The big ha' bible, ance his father's pride:
His bonnet reverently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare,
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion with judicious care,
And 'let us worship God,' he says with solemn air."

The canker-tooth of the most envious criticism cannot well fasten on a work in every respect so perfect; nor, in expatiating upon it, are we going out of the direct line of biography: it is known to be, in part, a picture of the household of William Burness. From pictures of national manners and sentiment we must turn to matters more personal.

Of the maidens of Kyle, who contributed by their charms of mind or person to the witchery of the love

songs of Burns, I can give but an imperfect account. The young woman who "had pledged her soul to meet him in the field of matrimony, yet jilted him with peculiar circumstances of mortification," he has not named; and I believe her charms, real or imaginary, have remained unsung. The Tibbie who scorned the advances of the Poet, and "spak na, but gade by like stoure," was a neighbouring laird's daughter, with a portion of two acres of peatmoss, and twenty pounds Scots. The Peggy who inspired some of his early lyrics was the sister of a Carrick farmer, a girl prudent as well as beautiful. The Nannie, who lived among the mosses near the Lugar, was a farmer's daughter, Agnes Fleming by name, and charmed the sweet song of "My Nannie O" from him, by the elegance of her person and the melody of her voice. "Green grow the Rashes," was a general tribute paid to the collective charms of the lasses of Kyle; there were few with whom he had not held tryste,

"Beneath the milk white thorn that scents the evening gale."

Some of those maidens were but, perhaps, the chance inspirers of his lyric strains. "Highland Mary," and "Mary in Heaven," of whom he has so passionately sung, was a native of Ardrossan. Those who think that poetry embalms high names alone, ladies of birth and rank must prepare to be disappointed, for Mary Campbell was a peasant's daughter, and lived, when she captivated the Poet, in the humble situation of dairy-maid in "the castle o' Montgomery." That she was beautiful, we have other testimony than that of Burns: her charms attracted gazers, if not

wooers, and she was exposed to the allurements of wealth. She withstood all temptation, and returned the affection of the Poet with the fervour of innocence and youth. "After a pretty long trial," says Burns, "of the most ardent, reciprocal affection, we met, by appointment, on the second Sunday of May, in a sequestered spot on the banks of the Ayr, where we spent a day in taking a farewell, before she should embark for the West Highlands, to arrange matters among her friends for our projected change of life. At the close of the autumn following, she crossed the sea to meet me at Greenock, where she had scarce landed, when she was seized with a malignant fever, which hurried my dear girl to her grave in a few days, before I could even learn of her illness."—"This adieu was performed," says Cromek, "in a striking and moving way; the lovers stood on each side of a small brook, they laved their hands in the stream, and holding a Bible between them, pronounced their vows to be faithful to each other. They parted never to meet again!"

The Bible on which they vowed their vows, is in the possession of the sister of Mary Campbell, at Ardrossan. On the first volume is written by the hand of Burns: "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely; I am the Lord.—*Leviticus*, chap, xix, v. 12." On the second volume, the same hand has written; "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths.—*St. Matthew*, chap. v., v. 33." And on the blank leaves of both columns is impressed his mark as a mason, and also signed below, "Robert Burns, Mossgiel."

These are touching insertions, but not more so than the verses in which he has embodied the parting scene :—

" How sweetly bloomed the gay-green birk,
  How rich the hawthorn's blossom,
As underneath their fragrant shade
  I clasped her to my bosom.
The golden hours on angel wings
  Flew o'er me and my dearie,
For dear to me as light and life,
  Was my sweet Highland Mary."

To the same affectionate young creature, Burns addressed a strain of scarcely inferior beauty, beginning with

" Will ye go to the Indies my Mary,
  And leave old Scotia's shore ?"

Nor did he forget her worth in after-life; his heart and fancy frequently travelled back to early scenes of joy or sorrow. Who the Mary Morison was on whom he wrote one of his early songs, I have not been able to discover; nor do I know the name of the heroine of "Cessnock Banks." Their beauty seems like that of many others, to have passed suddenly over him, touching his fancy without affecting his heart. The Eliza, from whom he seems so loth to part, in one of his songs, was, I am told by John Galt, less beautiful than witty.

To the charms of Jean Armour I have already alluded. This young woman, the daughter of a devout man and master-mason, lived in Mauchline, and was distinguished less for the beauty of her person, than for the grace of her dancing and the melody of her voice. Burns seems to have become attached to her soon after the loss of his Highland

Mary. In one of his joyous moments, he warned the maidens of Mauchline against reading inflammatory novels,—"their fine Tom Jones and Grandisons" served only as snares, he said, for their innocence:—

"Such witching books
Are baited hooks
For rakish rooks
Like Rob Mossgiel."

Who those maidens were he tells us in rhyme:—

"In Mauchline there dwells six proper young belles,
The pride of the place and its neighbourhood a';—
—Miss Miller is fine and Miss Markland's divine,
Miss Smith she has wit and Miss Betty is braw,
There's beauty and fortune to get with Miss Morton,
But Armour's the jewel for me o' them a'."

How the Poet and his Jean became acquainted is easily imagined by those who know the facilities for meetings of the young which fairs, races, dances, weddings, house-heatings, and kirn-suppers afford; of the growth of affection between them it is less easy to give an account; we must trace it by the uncertain light of his poetry.

In the "Epistle to Davie" he alludes to Jean Armour by name, and calls her his own; in the "Vision" he compliments the Muse of Kyle by comparing her clean straight and taper limbs to those of his bonnie Jean; and in one of his lyrics he speaks of the sighs and vows which have passed between them among the sequestered hills. It would seem, however, that during the season of their courtship the Poet felt less sure of the continuance of her affection than he had looked for, and something like change may be inferred from his

omitting a verse in the "Address to the Deil," in which he likened Eve to Jean Armour;—

"A dancing sweet young handsome quean,
Wi' guileless heart."

Gilbert charges his brother with seeing charms in some of the maidens of Kyle which others could not observe; but that may be said of all beautiful things. The ladies whom he celebrated in the latter days of his inspiration were—some of them at least—eminently lovely; and we all know that he has imputed no more merit to his Jean than what she possessed. Burns assured Professor Walker that his first desire to excel as a poet arose from the influence of the tender passion; and he informed others that all the heroines of his songs were real, and not imaginary. He dealt in

"No idly feigned poetic pains,
No fabled tortures quaint and tame."

As the Poet rose, and the lover triumphed, the farmer sunk. The farm of Mossgiel lies high, on a cold, wet bottom. During the first four years of the lease, instead of kindly and congenial seasons, the springs were frosty and late, the summers moist and cold; and to this the Poet glances when he makes the old dame in Halloween relate her experiences:—

"The simmer had been cauld and wat,
And stuff was unco green."

Frosty springs and late cold summers could not be foreseen; but any one might have known high lying land on a wet bottom. Seasons in which the sun is almost scorching other grounds are most congenial for such soils, and no one should venture upon a

farm which requires something like a miracle in the weather to render it productive. That Burns took pleasure in the labours of agriculture we have the assurance of many a voice: he often alludes to the holding of the plough, the turning of a handsome furrow; and he rejoices, too, in the growing corn, sees it fall before the sickle with something of a calculating eye, and raises the rick, and coats it over with broom against sleet and snow with all the foresight of a farmer. Of his prowess with the flail, he says ;—

"The thresher's weary flinging tree
The lee-lang day had tired me."

And Gilbert says, with the scythe Robert excelled all competitors: he had the sleight which is necessary with strength and activity. In ploughing he was likewise skilful: in the "Farmer's Address to his Mare," evidently alluding to himself, he says ;—

"Aft thee and I in aught-hours gaun,
In guid March weather,
Hae turned sax rood beside our han'
For days thegither."

Elsewhere the Poet speaks of his toil in committing the seed-corn to the furrow, and makes the Muse plead it as an excuse for declining labouring on Parnassus in the month of April :—

"Forjeskit sair, wi' weary legs,
Rattlin the corn out-owre the rigs,
Or dealing through amang the naigs
Their ten-hours bite,
My akwart Muse sair pleads and begs
I wadna write."

Of his farming establishment he gives us some insight in his facetious inventory to the surveyor of the taxes: it is pleasing to go to the homestead of even the cold and ungenial Mossgiel, and look at the

"gudes, and gear, and graith," with Burns for our guide:—

"Imprimis, then, for carriage cattle
I have four brutes of gallant mettle
As ever drew afore a pettle.
My lan-afore's a gude auld has been,
An' wight and wilfu' a' his days been.
My lan-ahin's a weel gaun fillie,
That aft has borne me hame frae Killie.
And your auld burro mony a time,
In days when riding was nae crime.
My fur-ahin's a worthy beast
As e'er in tug or tow was traced.
The fourth's a Highland Donald hastie,
A damned red wud Kilburnie blastie.
Forbye a cowt, of cowts the wale,
As ever ran afore a tail"

Of his milk-cows and calves, ewes and lambs, the mandate required no specification: the Poet proceeds to his farming implements; they are far from numerous:—

"Wheel carriages I have but few,
Three carts, an' twa are feckly new,
An auld wheelbarrow, mair for token,
Ae leg and baith the trams are broken."

Ploughs, harrows, shel-bands, rollers, spades, hoes, and fanners, were not taxed, and are omitted, which I am sorry for; we come now to the members of his household:—

"For men I've three mischievous boys,
Run deils for rantin and for noise,
A gaudsman ane, a thrasher tother,
Wee Davoc hauds the nowte in fother."

Nor is the Bard unmindful of maintaining rule and spreading information amongst his menials:—

"I rule them as I ought, discreetly,
And aften labour them completely.
And aye on Sundays duly nightly
I on the questions targe them tightly."

With respect to maid-servants, as his mother and

sisters managed the in-door economy of the house, he had no occasion for any; he desired besides, he said, to be kept out of temptation; neither had he a wife, and as for children, one more had been sent to him than he desired:—

"My sonsie, smirking, dear-bought Bess,
She stares the daddie in her face,
Enough of ought ye like but grace."

Burns saw in the failure of the farm the coming ruin of his mother's household, and despairing of success in agriculture, revived a notion which he had long entertained of going out as a sort of steward to the plantations, a situation which, for a small salary, requires the presence of many high qualities. Nor did he take this resolution one moment too soon: his poetic account of his condition and sufferings is not at all poetical;—

"To tremble under Fortune's cummock,
On scarce a bellyfu' o' drummock,
For his proud, independent stomach,
Could ill agree."

But bodily discomfort was not all: he might, to use his own language, have braved the bitter blast of misfortune, which, long mustering over his head, was about to descend; but sorrows of a tender nature, from which there was no escape, came pouring upon him in a flood.

This part of the Poet's history has been painted variously: delicacy towards the living, and respect for the dead, seemed to call for gentle handling; but this could not always be obtained; for rude hands were but too ready to aggravate the outline and darken the colours. The courtship between

Burns and Jean Armour continued for several years; and there is no question, had fortune permitted, but that they would have been man and wife the first year of their acquaintance. But Burns was not poor only—he had no chance of becoming rich, and the day of marriage was placed at the mercy of fortune. There were other obstacles: Jean was not only the daughter of a man rigid and devout, but the favourite child of one of the believers in the glory of the Old Light. Her father discountenanced the addresses which a profane scoffer and irreligious rhymer was making to his child, and the lovers, denied the sanction of paternal care, and the shelter of the domestic roof, had recourse to stolen meetings under the cloud of night; to twilight interviews under the greenwood tree; to the solace of "a cannie hour at 'een," and those "sighs and vows among the knowes" of which the Poet has sung with so much passion. In protracted courtship there is always danger; prudence seldom takes much care of the young and the warm-hearted: Jean was not out of her teens, and thought more of her father's ungentleness than of her own danger; the Poet's respect for sweetness and innocence protected her for a while—but he was doomed to feel what he afterwards sung:—

"Wha can prudence think upon,
And sic a lassie by him?
Wha can prudence think upon,
And sae in love as I am!"

These convoyings home in the dark, and meetings under "the milk-white thorn," ended in the Poet being promised to be made a father before

he had become a husband. This, to one so destitute and utterly poor as Burns, was a stunning event: but that was not the worst; the father of Jean Armour heard with much anguish of his favourite daughter's condition; and when, on her knees before him, she implored forgiveness, and showed the marriage lines—as the private acknowledgment of marriage without the sanction of the kirk is called—his anguish grew into anger which overflowed all bounds, and heeded neither his daughter's honour nor her husband's fame. He snatched her marriage certificate from her, threw it into the fire, and commanded her to think herself no longer the wife of the Poet. It must be accepted as a proof of paternal power that Jean trembled and obeyed: she forgot that Burns was still her husband in the sight of Heaven, and according to the laws of man: she refused to see him, or hearken to aught he could say; and, in short, was ruled in every thing by the blind hatred of her father.

What the Poet thought of all this we have abundance of testimony. Though his indignation against Mr. Armour could not but be high, it is to his honour that he refrained from giving him further pain than he had inflicted already: he spoke, too, of Jean more in sorrow than in anger. In the first outburst of passion, on finding that she refused to call herself his wife, and had allowed her marriage lines to be burnt, he indulged in a sort of bitter mirth; and, in a poem of great merit, and greater freedom of expression, sang of the vexation which Kyle and her maidens must feel at parting with one

who could doubly soothe them with love-making and song. He alludes to the causes of his departure to the West Indies—

> "He saw Misfortune's cauld nor-west
> Lang mustering up a bitter blast;
> A Jillet brak his heart at last,
> Ill may she be!
> So took a birth afore the mast,
> An' owre the sea."

He speaks, too, of his way of life, and accounts for the poverty of a poet with a clear income of seven pounds a year!—

> "He ne'er was gien to great misguiding,
> Yet coin his pouches wad na bide in;
> Wi' him it ne'er was under hiding,
> He dealt it free;
> The Muse was a' that he took pride in,
> That's owre the sea."

This mirthful mood did not last long; there is little gaiety in his letter to David Bryce, of June 12th, 1786,—"I am still in the land of the living, though I can scarcely say in the place of hope. What poor ill-advised Jean thinks of her conduct, I dont know; but one thing I do know—she has made me completely miserable. Never man loved, or rather adored, a woman more than I did her; and, to confess a truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all. My poor dear unfortunate Jean! It is not the losing her that makes me so unhappy, but for her sake I feel most severely: I foresee she is in the road to, I fear, eternal ruin. May Almighty God forgive her ingratitude and perjury to me, as I from my very soul forgive her; and may his grace be with her and bless her in all her future life! I can have no nearer idea of the

place of eternal punishment than what I have felt in my own breast on her account. I have tried often to forget her; I have run into all kinds of dissipation and riots, mason-meetings, drinking-matches, and other mischief, to drive her out of my head, but all in vain. And now for a grand cure: the ship is on her way home that is to take me out to Jamaica; and then farewell, dear old Scotland! and farewell, dear ungrateful Jean! for never, never will I see you more." In this touching letter the Poet sets off his own sufferings against Jean Armour's shame; and we may calculate their depth and acuteness from his looking on her as ungrateful.

He gave vent to the same feeling in the most pathetic of all modern poems, "The Lament for the unfortunate Issue of a Friend's Amour:" every stanza is most exquisitely mournful:—

> "No idly feigned poetic pains
> My sad love-lorn lamentings claim;
> No shepherd's pipe—Arcadian strains;
> No fabled tortures, quaint and tame:
> The plighted faith, the mutual flame,
> The oft-attested powers above,
> The promised father's tender name—
> These were the pledges of my love."

The account rendered by Gilbert makes Robert consent to the destruction of the marriage lines, which is at least doubtful. In truth, there was much anguish on all sides; and, condemning the stern father as we do, we cannot help reverencing the feeling which sacrificed his daughter's peace in this world, in the belief that he was securing happiness for her in the next. That he doubted her constancy, I have heard affirmed by those who had an opportu-

nity of knowing; and, to remove temptation from her path, acquiesced in the Poet's resolution to push his fortune in Jamaica, though there is no foundation, perhaps, for the surmise that he more than tolerated the parish authorities to pursue Burns according to law, for the maintenance of the promised babe, in order to hasten his departure. This is, nevertheless, countenanced by the circumstance of his ability to keep the child. Had he promised this, the Poet would not have been obliged to skulk "from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail;" and he means more than the usual parochial authorities, when he says—"Some ill-advised persons had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels."

Amid all these miseries of mind and sufferings of body, Burns brought out that volume which first told the world that a new and a mighty poet had arisen in the land. This, though forced from him by "the luckless star which ruled his lot," had been often present to his contemplation. He resorted to it not so much to gratify his love of fame, as with the hope that the publication would bring money enough to convey him over the Atlantic; nor were friends wanting to aid him in this very moderate desire. It is to the credit of the personal merit of Burns, and to the honour of his associates, that they shrunk not from his side in the trying hour of adversity. Among these, Gavin Hamilton; Robert Aiken, writer, Ayr; John Ballantine, banker, Ayr; Robert Muir, merchant, Kilmarnock; and William Parker, merchant, Kilmarnock, were the most active and conspicuous. Parker alone subscribed for thirty-five copies. There

is little merit in discovering and befriending genius when Fame is sounding her trumpet, and crying, "Behold the man whom the king delighteth to honour!" but to mark talents, and aid them when the possessor is struggling out of darkness into light, shews either great generosity or a fine judgment, or both. Thus supported, he was enabled to enter into terms with Wilson, a printer, in Kilmarnock. The Poet undertook to supply manuscript, walk daily into Kilmarnock to correct the press, and pay all the expenses incident to printing six hundred copies.

Of what passed in the mind of Burns at this moment, we have his own account to Moore:—"I weighed," said he, "my productions as impartially as was in my power. I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver, or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits. To know myself had been all along my constant study; I weighed myself alone, I balanced myself with others, I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and a poet; I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation, where the lights and shades in character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but, at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, having got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty." "Wee Johnnie," the printer, the body

without a soul of the Poet's epigram, shrewdly remarked that a poem of a grave nature would be better for beginning with: Burns acted on the hint, and in walking between Kilmarnock and Mossgiel, composed the "Twa Dogs." At that period, ruin had him so effectually in the wind, that even food became scanty; a piece of oat-cake and a bottle of two-penny ale made his customary dinner, when correcting the first edition of his immortal works, and of this he was not always certain.

In July, 1786, the poems of Burns made their appearance; he introduced them with a preface, intimating his condition in life, and claiming for them the protection of his country. "Unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners he felt, and saw in himself and their rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language. To amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the toils and fatigues of a laborious life; to transcribe the various feelings, the loves, the griefs, the hopes, the fears in his own breast; to find some kind of counterpoise to the struggles of a world—always an alien scene—a task uncouth to the poetical mind—these were his motives for courting the muses, and in these he found poetry to be its own reward. 'Humility,' says Shenstone, 'has depressed many a genius to a hermit, but never raised one to fame!' If any critic catches at the word genius, the author tells him, once for all, that he certainly looks upon himself as possessed of some poetic abilities; otherwise his publishing in the

manner he has done would be a manœuvre below the worst character which he hopes his worst enemy will ever give him." The heart-warm welcome which his poems received in his own district fulfilled the hopes of the Poet; all read who could obtain the book, and all who read applauded; even the children of the Old Light admitted that he was a wondrous rhymer to be a profane person. The whole impression was soon disposed of; the fears of "Wee Johnnie," the printer, anent remuneration were allayed, and twenty pounds and odd remained in the pockets of the wondering bard, after defraying all expenses. The first use he made of his good fortune was to renew his application for a situation in the West Indies, and lay aside a sum sufficient to waft him over the sea. With a desire of keeping such a genius at home, his steadfast friends, Hamilton and Aiken, sought to obtain him an appointment in the Excise—an evil which awaited him on a later day.

With some, the rising of this western star in poetry was looked for; his poems in manuscript had been widely circulated in Ayrshire, but to Scotland at large his appearance was unexpected; and had a July sun risen on a December morning, the unwonted light could not have given greater surprise. The fame of the bard of Mauchline flew east, west, north, and south. A love of poetry belongs as much to the humble classes of the north as to the high; and to people who had much of Ramsay and Fergusson by heart, the more lofty and passionate poetry of Burns could not fail to

be welcome. The milkmaid sung his songs, the ploughmen and shepherds repeated his poems, while the old and the sagacious quoted his verses in conversation, glad to find that matters of fancy could be made useful. My father, who was fond of poetry, procured the volume from a Cameronian clergymen, with this remarkable admonition, " Keep it out of the way of your children, John, lest ye catch them as I caught mine, reading it on the sabbath."

" It is hardly possible," says Heron, " to express with what eager admiration and delight the poems were every where received. They eminently possessed all those qualities which can contribute to render any literary work quickly and permanently popular. They were written in a phraseology of which all the powers were universally felt; and which being at once antique, familiar, and now rarely written, was hence fitted to serve all the dignified and picturesque uses of poetry, without making it unintelligible. The imagery, the sentiments, were at once faithfully natural, and irresistibly impressive and interesting. Those topics of satire and scandal in which the rustic delights, that humorous delineation of character, and that witty association of ideas, familiar and striking, yet not naturally allied to one another, which has force to shake his sides with laughter; those fancies of superstition at which he still wonders and trembles; those affecting sentiments and images of true religion, which are at once dear and awful to his heart, were represented by Burns with all a poet's magic power. Old and young, high and low, grave and gay, learned or

ignorant, all were alike delighted, agitated, and transported."

To many copies of his works the Poet added other attractions: he caused blank leaves to be inserted, on which he wrote such favourite sallies of love or humour as he had refrained from printing; or, more solicitous still to please, inscribed neat and complimentary lines addressed to those who, by their taste and station, might either feel his merit or be disposed to patronize him. Of those whom he sought to propitiate, one of the most eminent was Dugald Stewart: during the summer months the professor and his lady lived at Catrine, Burns was sometimes their guest; and much as they were pleased with his verses, they were still more so with his conversation, which was unaffected and manly. During one of his visits he was introduced to Lord Daer, and as this seems to have been the first time he had met a lord, he recorded the event in rhymes equally vigorous and untranslateable; his emotions are described as no one but himself could have described them:—

"But, oh! for Hogarth's matchless power,
To show Sir Bardie's willyart glower,
An' how he stared an' stammered,
When goavan as if led wi' branks,
An' stumpan on his ploughman shanks,
He in the parlour hammered."

His poems touched the gentlest hearts: Mrs. Stewart of Stair, a lady accomplished as well as beautiful, was one of the first to admire them, and to seek the acquaintance of the author; neither her kindness nor that of the Stewarts of Catrine were forgotten. Upon the robe of Coila he depicted per-

haps too many complimentary things: in the "Brigs of Ayr" he is more select:—

"Next followed Courage, with his martial stride,
From where the Feal wild woody coverts hide;
Benevolence, with mild, benignant air,
A female form, came from the towers of Stair:
Learning and Worth in equal measures trod
From simple Catrine, their long loved abode."

Nor did Burns think this enough: the woods of Catrine are mentioned in one or more of his succeeding songs, and the Lady of the Towers of Stair is remembered in a lyric of no common beauty. He imagines himself straying on the banks of Afton Water, and perceives the heroine asleep among the flowers on its side. He then addresses the stream, and promises to sing a song to its honour if it will flow softly, nor disturb the repose of one so sweet and beautiful. The lady understood the forward ways of the muse, and smiled. Mrs. Scott, of Wauchope-house, a painter and poetess, in a rhyming letter of considerable ease and gaiety, intimated her admiration of the "Cantie witty rhyming ploughman." In his answer Burns alludes to his aspirations, when "beardless, young and blate," with great felicity:—

"Even then a wish, I mind its power,
A wish, that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast,
That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
Some useful plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang at least."

But the friendship which the various biographers of Burns seem to be most solicitous about, is that of Mrs. Dunlop, of Dunlop. That lady, the daughter of Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie, was proud of her

descent from the race of Elderslie, and proud of her acquirements, which were considerable. Nor should we leave unmentioned that she had some talent for rhyme. She had been ailing, and the first advantage which she took of returning health was to read the poems of the Ayrshire ploughman. She was struck with the beauty, natural and religious, of the "Cottar's Saturday Night."—"The Poet's description of the simple cottagers," she told Gilbert Burns, "operated on her mind like the charm of a powerful exorcist, repelling the demon *ennui*, and restoring her to her wonted harmony and satisfaction." An express, sent sixteen miles, for half-a-dozen copies of the book, and an invitation to Dunlop-house, attested her sincerity. Nor was the Poet less sincere in his answer—he admired her illustrious ancestor.—"In my boyish days," he observes, "I remember in particular being struck with that part of Wallace's story where these lines occur:—

'Syne to the Leglen wood when it was late,
To make a silent and a safe retreat.'

I chose a fine summer Sunday, the only day my line of life allowed, and walked half-a-dozen miles to pay my respects to the Leglen wood, with as much devout enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto; and as I explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countrymen to have lodged, I recollect—for even then I was a rhymer—that my heart glowed with a wish to be able to make a song on him in some measure equal to his merits." All this was in unison with the feelings of the lady as well as with his own. From this period

we must date a friendship which did not close with the Poet's life, and to which we owe many of his most dignified and happy letters.

But the notice of lords, the attention of professors, and the kindness of beauty, were empty though honourable things; the twenty pounds which his speculation in verse brought diminished rather than increased, and he felt, with a darkening spirit, that he could not live on applause. It never seems to have occurred to any one of his wealthy admirers that he was in a state of destitution, and that many places of profit existed which he could fill with honour. He who is invited to feast at a distance with the powerful and the polite—who has to walk seven miles of rough road to the dinner-table—is expected to write songs on the beautiful—be witty with the witty, and at midnight return to his blanket and his straw, must be considered as having earned his dinner fairly—and this happened often to Burns. All that his poetry brought him was barren applause; and when he consulted "Wee Johnnie" about publishing a second edition, the printer demurred, which so incensed the Poet, that he would not speak again on the subject, and refused the generous offers of several of his first and best friends to subscribe for copies enow to secure Wilson against loss. He now looked seriously to the West Indies, procured the situation of overseer on an estate in Jamaica belonging to Dr. Douglas, and prepared for departure. Of this all his friends seem to have been aware, but no one interposed. It was now the middle of November, and the sound

which his poems had raised in the country began to die away.

There was still one family of influence in the district to whom Burns had not been introduced; and as no one had tried to do this for him, he now resolved to do it for himself. In the preceding July, it seems, he had accidentally met Miss Alexander, of Ballochmyle, a young lady of great beauty, among her native woods on the banks of Ayr. How the river banks looked in those days I know not, but the bard instantly clothed them with flowers, gave odorous dews to the grass, a richer incense to the fields of beans, a sweeter song to the thrush, and a brighter sunshine to the tree-tops; and into this natural shrine introduced his new object of adoration, under the name of "The Lass of Ballochmyle." Neither elegance of thought nor of expression were wanting to render the compliment acceptable:—

"With careless step I onward strayed,
My heart rejoiced in nature's joy,
When musing in a lonely glade
A maiden fair I chanced to spy;
Her look was like the morning's eye,
Her air like nature's vernal smile,
Perfection whispered, passing by,
'Behold the lass of Ballochmyle.'"

As he proceeds with his song, the Bard recollects that loveliness is sent into the world for other purposes than to be gazed at, and exclaims, much to the distress of gentle critics and fastidious spinsters—who looked, it seems, for a display of chivalry instead of nature:—

"O! had she been a country maid,
And I the happy country swain,
Tho' sheltered in the lowliest shed
That ever rose on Scotland's plain,

Thro' weary winter's wind and rain
  With joy, with rapture, I would toil,
And nightly to my bosom strain
  The bonny lass of Ballochmyle."

He copied this fine lyric out in a fair hand, and sent it to Miss Alexander, accompanied by a letter, the composition of which, it is said, cost him more than the song. It has not, however, all the happy ease of the verse. Of the song he says:—"The scenery was nearly taken from real life, though I dare say, madam, you do not recollect it, as I believe you scarcely noticed the poetic *rêveur* as he wandered by you. I had roved out as chance directed, in the favourite haunts of my muse on the banks of Ayr, to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The evening sun was flaming over the distant western hills; not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom or the verdant spreading leaf. It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers pouring their harmony on every hand with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my way, lest I should disturb their little songs, or frighten them to another station. Such was the scene and such the hour, when in a corner of my prospect I spied one of the fairest pieces of Nature's workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape or met a poet's eye, those visionary bards excepted who hold converse with aërial beings. Had Calumny and Villany taken my walk, they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object. What an hour of inspiration for a poet! it would have raised plain dull historic prose into metaphor and measure. The enclosed song was the

work of my return home; and, perhaps, it but poorly answers what might have been expected from such a scene."

What the lady thought of the song we are not told—what Burns thought of her silence he has informed us. She paid no attention to his effusions, and wounded his self-love by her ungracious neglect. Currie and Lockhart have united in defending the 'Lass of Ballochmyle.' "Her modesty," says the first, "might prevent her from perceiving that the muse of Tibullus breathed in this nameless poet, and that her beauty was awakening strains destined to immortality on the banks of the Ayr. Burns was at that time little known, and, where known at all, noted rather for the wild strength of his humour than for those strains of tenderness in which he afterwards so much excelled. To the lady herself, his name, perhaps, had never been mentioned."—"His verses," says the latter, "written in commemoration of that passing glimpse of her beauty, are conceived in a strain of luxurious fervour, which, certainly, coming from a man of Burns' station and character, must have sounded very strangely in a delicate maiden's ear." These remarks might have been spared; the man and his poems were well known to all in the west country long before the 18th of November, 1786: we must not suppose Miss Alexander more fastidious and difficult to please than Mrs. Stewart of Catrine, Mrs. Stewart of Stair, or Mrs. Dunlop, with all of whom he was living on terms of friendship before that time. He who had written and published "Man was made to mourn," "The Daisy," "The Mouse," and "The Cottar's Saturday Night," was

known for more than the wild strength of his humour; nor can we imagine that any lady of education could feel much alarm at the fervour of the song: Miss Alexander knew that poetry and love are brothers, and that the latter acknowledges no other merit than what is personal. The Poet chose, rather than "raise a mortal to the skies," to "bring an angel down."

This was the last of his efforts to obtain notice in his native district. He now wrote to his friends, Hamilton and Aiken, saying he was afraid that his follies would prevent him from enjoying a situation in the Excise, even if it could be procured; he was pining in secret wretchedness; disappointment, pride, and remorse were settling on his vitals like vultures, and in an hour of social mirth his gaiety was the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner.—"All these reasons," he says, "urge me to go abroad, and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances every thing that can be laid in the scale against it." He wrote in the same strain to others. This was on the 19th of November; on the 20th he enclosed a copy of "Holy Willie's Prayer" to his comrades, Chalmers and M'Adam, desiring it might be burnt, as a thing abominable and wicked, at the Cross of Ayr; and on the twenty-second, he wrote, as he imagined, the last song he was to measure in Caledonia:—

"The gloomy night is gath'ring fast,
Loud roars the wild, inconstant blast,
Yon murky cloud is foul with rain,
I see it driving o'er the plain;

Chill runs my blood to hear it rave,
I think upon the stormy wave,
Where many a danger I must dare,
Far from the bonnie banks of Ayr."

It was well for the world, and, perhaps, unfortunate for Burns, that when he had bid farewell to his friends, put his chest on the way to Greenock, and was about to follow, a letter from Dr. Blacklock overthrew all his schemes. The way this came about has something in it of the romantic. Laurie, minister of Loudoun, a kind and stedfast friend, sent a copy of the poems, with a short account of Burns, to his friend, Dr. Blacklock, a middling poet, but a most worthy man, with unbounded kindness of nature and generosity of soul. Blacklock was blind, and as he could not read for himself, an almost fatal delay took place: the ship was unmooring, and the Poet on the wing, when his opinion of the poems, and the steps which he advised the author to take, reached the hands of Laurie. The letter was instantly forwarded to Burns, who read it with surprise not unmingled with tears. The blind bard was none of your cold formal men who give guarded opinions—he said what he felt; and as his heart was in the right place, spoke out with a warmth and an ecstasy new in the province of criticism:—

"Many instances have I seen," he says, "of nature's force or beneficence exerted under numerous and formidable disadvantages, but none equal to that with which you have been kind enough to present me. There is a pathos and delicacy in his se-

rious poems, a vein of wit and humour in those of a more festive turn, which cannot be too much admired nor too warmly approved; and I think I shall never open the book without feeling my astonishment renewed and increased. It has been told me by a gentleman to whom I showed the performances, and who sought a copy with diligence and ardour, that the whole impression is already exhausted. It were, therefore, much to be wished, for the sake of the young man, that a second edition, more numerous than the former, should immediately be printed; as it appears certain that its intrinsic merit, and the exertions of the author's friends, might give it a more universal circulation than anything of the kind which has been published in my memory."—"This encouragement," says Burns, "fired me so much, that away I posted to Edinburgh, without a single acquaintance or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence on my zenith for once made a revolution to the nadir." That he was personally unknown to any one of influence in Edinburgh, save Dugald Stewart, and that he took letters of introduction to no one, is perfectly true. Pride had something to do in this. He had begun to feel that a warm dinner and a kind word were to be his chief portion in Kyle; and the silence of one, and the coldness of another, stung him, it is said, deeper than even he was willing to allow. He determined to owe his future fortune, whatever it might be, to no one around; he turned his face to Arthur's Seat, and sung with

much buoyancy of heart, as he went, a soothing snatch of an old ballad :—

"As I came in by Glenap,
I met with an aged woman,
She bade me cheer up my heart,
For the best of my days was coming."

PART II :—EDINBURGH.

The first appearance of Burns in Edinburgh was humble enough. The money reserved to waft him to the West Indies had been laid out on clothes for this new expedition, or on the family at Mossgiel; and, having little in his pocket, he found his way to his friend Richmond, a writer's apprentice, and accepted the offer of a share of his room and bed, in the house of a Mrs. Carfrae, Baxter's-close, Lawnmarket. Though he had taken a stride from the furrowed field into the land of poetry, and abandoned the plough for the harp, he seemed for some days to feel, as in earlier life, unfitted with an aim, and wandered about, looking down from Arthur's Seat, surveying the Palace, gazing at the Castle, or contemplating the windows of the booksellers' shops, where he saw all works, save the poems of the Ayrshire Ploughman. He found his way to the lowly grave of Fergusson, and, kneeling down, kissed the sod: he sought out the house of Allan Ramsay, and, on entering it, took off his hat; and, when he was afterwards introduced to Creech, the bibliopole, remembered that he had before heard him inquiring if

this had been the shop of the author of "The Gentle Shepherd." In one of these excursions he happened to meet with an Ayrshire friend, Mr. Dalrymple, of Orangefield; others say Mr. Dalzell—and some say both—by whom he was introduced to James Earl of Glencairn, who took him by the hand, and with small persuasion prevailed on Creech to become the publisher of the contemplated edition on terms favourable to Burns. The Poet stipulated to receive one hundred pounds for the copyright of one edition, with the profits of the subscription copies. A prospectus was drawn out, a vast number printed and circulated over the island, and subscriptions came pouring in with a rapidity unknown in the history of Scottish genius.

It is honourable to the patricians of the north that they welcomed the Poet with much cordiality, and subscribed largely; it is honourable to the stately literati of Edinburgh that they not only received their rustic brother gladly into their ranks, but spoke every where of his fine genius with undissembled rapture, and introduced him wherever introductions were beneficial: but it is still more honourable to the husbandmen, the shepherds, and the mechanics of Scotland, that though wages were small, and money scarce, they subscribed for copies, in fifties and in hundreds, and thus extended the patronage, always the most welcome since it implies admiration. Of the noblemen, the most active was the Earl of Glencairn; through his influence the association, called the Caledonian Hunt, consisting of the chiefs of the northern aristocracy, consented

to accept the dedication of the new edition, and to subscribe individually for copies: the gentlemen, too, of the west, proud that their district, long unproductive in high genius, had ceased to be barren, vied with each other in promoting the interest of the Bard of Kyle; while Blair, Robertson, Blacklock, Smith, Fergusson, Stewart, Mackenzie, Tytler, and Lords Craig and Monboddo—all men distinguished in the world of letters, lent their still more effectual aid; nay, some of them carried the subscription-lists in their pockets, and obtained names through all their wide range of acquaintance.

Burns arrived in Edinburgh at the close of November, 1786; and before, as he poetically said, the cry of the cuckoo was heard, no less than two thousand eight hundred and odd copies were subsubscribed for by fifteen hundred and odd subscribers. His genius was already felt by high and low—lettered, and unlettered. The Caledonian Hunt took one hundred copies; Creech took five hundred; the Earl of Eglinton, forty-two; the Duchess of Gordon, twenty-one; the Earl of Glencairn, and his Countess, twenty-four; the Scots College at Valladolid, the Scots College at Douay, the Scots College at Paris, the Scots Benedictine Monastery at Ratisbon, severally took copies; Campbell, of Clathick, subscribed for twelve; Douglas, of Cavers, for eight; Dalrymple, of Orangefield, for ten; Dunlop, of Dunlop, for six; Sir William Forbes, of Pitsligo, for eight; Lord Graham, for twelve; Gray, of Gartcraig, for six; Sir James Hunter Blair, for eight; Hamilton, of Argyle-square, Edinburgh, for

eight. Subscriptions for four copies are very numerous: one-half, however, of the list, is composed of humble names; nor should the weavers of the west be forgotten. The sons of the shuttle went not more willingly from Kilmarnock to Mauchline Holy Fair, than they poured in their names for their Poet's works.

Of the manners and appearance of Burns in Edinburgh much has been written and said; every step which he took to the right or to the left has been noted; the company which he kept has afforded matter for philosophic speculation, and his sayings and doings have found a place in the memoranda of the learned, and in the memories of the polite. Even when weighed in the balance of acquired taste and artificial manners, the Poet was scarcely found wanting: he was come of a class who think strongly, speak freely, and act as they think. The natural good manners which belong to genius were his: but accustomed to hold argument with his rustic compeers, and to vanquish them more by rough vigour than by delicate persuasion, he had some difficulty in schooling down his impetuous spirit into the charmed circle of conventional politeness. That he sometimes observed and sometimes neglected this, is natural enough; the fervid impatience of his temper hurried him into the van at times when his post was in the rear. He had too little tolerance for the stately weak and the learnedly dull; and holding the patent of his own honours immediately from God, he scarcely could be brought to pay homage to honours arising from humbler sources.

But if he refused to be tame in the society of the titled and the learned, he was another being in the company of the fair and the lovely. His poetry at first sprung from love; and though ambition now claimed its share, the softness and amenity of the purer passion triumphed, and with the lovely he was all pathos and persuasion, gaiety and grace. His look changed, his eye beamed milder, all that was stern or contradictory in his nature vanished when he heard the rustle of approaching silks: charmed himself by beauty, he charmed beauty in his turn. In large companies the loveliness of the north formed a circle round where he sat; and with the feathers of duchesses and ladies of high degree fanning his brow, he was all gentleness and attention. The Duchess of Gordon said that Burns, in his address to ladies, was extremely deferential, and always with a turn to the pathetic or the humorous, which won their attention; and added, with much naïveté, that she never met with a man whose conversation carried her so completely off her feet. He who was often intractable and fierce in the presence of man, grew soft and submissive in the company of woman: this was neither unobserved or unrewarded. When, in his later days, many men looked on the setting of the star of Burns with unconcern or coldness, the fair and the lovely neither slackened in their admiration or their friendship.

How he appeared in the sight of others, Dugald Stewart has told us.—" He came," says the Professor, " to Edinburgh early in the winter: the attentions which he received during his stay in town

from all ranks and descriptions of persons, was such as would have turned any head but his own. I cannot say that I could perceive any unfavourable effect which they left on his mind. He retained the same simplicity of manners and appearance which had struck me so forcibly when I first saw him in the country; nor did he seem to feel any additional self-importance from the number and rank of his new acquaintance. His dress was perfectly suited to his station—plain and unpretending, with sufficient attention to neatness. If I recollect right, he always wore boots; and when on more than usual ceremony, buckskin-breeches. His manners were then, as they continued ever afterwards, simple, manly, and independent; strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth, but without any thing that indicated frowardness, arrogance, or vanity. He took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him; and listened, with apparent attention and deference, on subjects where his want of education deprived him of the means of information. If there had been a little more of gentleness and accommodation in his temper, he would, I think, have been still more interesting; but he had been accustomed to give law in the circle of his ordinary acquaintance, and his dread of any thing approaching to meanness or servility rendered his manner somewhat decided and hard. Nothing, perhaps, was more remarkable among his various attainments than the fluency, and precision, and originality of his language when he spoke in company; more particularly as he aimed at purity in his turn of

expression, and avoided more successfully than most Scotchmen the peculiarities of Scottish phraseology.

"In the course of the spring (1787) he called on me once or twice at my request, early in the morning, and walked with me to Braid Hills in the neighbourhood of the town, where he charmed me still more by his private conversation than he had ever done in company. He was passionately fond of the beauties of nature; and I recollect he once told me, when I was admiring a distant prospect in one of our morning walks, that the sight of so many smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind which none could understand who had not witnessed, like himself, the happiness and worth which cottages contained. Among the poets whom I have happened to know, I have been struck in more than one instance with the unaccountable disparity between their general talent and the occasional inspirations of their more favoured moments. But all the faculties of Burns' mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous, and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. From his conversation, I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities. Notwithstanding various reports I heard during the preceding winter, of Burns' predilection for convivial and not very select society, I should have concluded in favour of his habits of sobriety,

from all of him that ever fell under my own observation."

Nor is the testimony of Professor Walker less decided; for him, as well as for Burns, Doon had poured all her floods—the rising sun had glinted gloriously over Galston Moors, and snow had lain untrodden on the hills of Ochiltree: he was a native of Kyle, and interested in all that added to its renown. "In conversation Burns was powerful, his conceptions and expressions were of corresponding vigour, and on all subjects were as remote as possible from common-places. Though somewhat authoritative, it was in a way that gave little offence, and was readily imputed to his inexperience in those modes of smoothing dissent and softening assertion, which are important characteristics of polished manners. After breakfast, I requested him to communicate some of his unpublished pieces, and he recited his farewell song to the Banks of Ayr, introducing it with a description of the circumstances in which it was composed, more striking than the poem itself. He had left Dr. Laurie's family, and on his way home had to cross a wide stretch of solitary moor. His mind was strongly affected by parting for ever with a scene where he had tasted so much elegant and social pleasure. The aspect of nature harmonized with his feelings—it was a lowering and heavy evening; the wind was up, and whistled through the rushes and long spear-grass which bent before it; the clouds were driven across the sky, and cold pelting showers, at intervals, added dis-

comfort of body to cheerlessness of mind. His recitation was plain, slow, articulate and forcible, but without any eloquence or art. He did not always lay the emphasis with propriety, nor did he humour the sentiment by the variations of his voice."

As Heron—a man who rose by the force of his talents, and fell by the keenness of his passions—is the least favourable to the Poet of all his biographers, we may quote him without fear:—"The conversation of Burns was, in comparison with the formal and exterior circumstances of his education, perhaps even more wonderful than his poetry. He affected no soft airs or graceful motions of politeness, which might have ill accorded with the rustic plainness of his native manners. Conscious superiority of mind taught him to associate with the great, the learned, and the gay, without being overawed into any such bashfulness as might have made him confused in thought or hesitating in elocution. In conversation he displayed a sort of intuitive quickness and rectitude of judgment upon every subject that arose; the sensibility of his heart and the vivacity of his fancy gave a rich colouring to whatever reasoning he was disposed to advance, and his language in conversation was not at all less happy than his writings; for these reasons he did not fail to please immediately after having been first seen. I remember that the late Dr. Robertson once observed to me, that he had scarcely ever met with any man whose conversation discovered greater vigour and activity of mind than that of Burns."

The more generous looked with wonder on the bold Peasant, who had claimed and taken place with the foremost, and who seemed to have endowments of every kind equal to his ambition; while other geniuses, raised by the artificial heat of colleges and schools, glanced with scorn or envy on one who had sprung into fame through the genial warmth of nature. Henry Mackenzie was not of the latter; as soon as he read the poems of Burns, he perceived that the right inspiration was in them, and recommended them and their author to public notice, in a paper in The Lounger, written with feeling and truth. The criticism struck the true note of his peculiar genius, and with something like prescience, claimed the honours of "National Poet," which have since been so strongly conceded.

This was regarded by some as not a little rash on the part of Mackenzie; the rustic harp of Scotland had not been for centuries swept by a hand so forcible and free; the language was that of humble life, the scenes were the clay-cottage, the dusty barn, and the stubble field, and the characters the clouterly children of the penfold and the plough. There was nothing in the new prodigy which could be called classic, little which those who looked through the vista of a college reckoned poetical; and his verses were deemed rather the effusions of a random rhymer than a true poet. Speaking from his heart, Mackenzie spoke right; and in claiming for Burns the honours due to the elect in song, he did a good deed for genius. The Poet now stood at the head of northern song, and with historians, and philosophers, and critics

applauding, he looked upon himself as "owned" by the best judges of his country.

The well-timed kindness of Mackenzie was never forgotten by Burns; from this time he prized the Man of Feeling as a book next in worth to the Bible; he never mentioned the author save in terms of affectionate admiration, and ranked him among his benefactors:—

"Mackenzie, Stewart, sic a brace
As Rome ne'er saw."

He felt his high, and, to his fancy, dangerous elevation:—"You are afraid," he thus writes, January 15, 1787, to Mrs. Dunlop, "I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet. Alas! madam, I know myself and the world too well. I do not put on any airs of affected modesty; I am willing to believe that my abilities deserve some notice; but in a most enlightened age and nation, when poetry is and has been the study of men of the first natural genius, aided with all the powers of polite learning, polite books, and polite company, to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity and crude unpolished ideas on my head! I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy; and, however a friend or the world may differ from me in that particular, I stand for my own opinion in silent resolve, with all the tenaciousness of property. I mention this to you once for all to disburthen my mind, and I do not wish to hear or say more about it; but "when proud fortune's ebbing tide recedes," you will bear me witness that, when my bubble of fame

was at the highest, I stood unintoxicated with the inebriating cup in my hand, looking forward, with rueful resolve, to the hastening time when the blow of calumny should dash it to the ground with all the eagerness of vengeful triumph."

The Poet speaks, about the same time, in a similar strain to the Rev. Mr. Laurie, who, it seems, had warned him to beware of vanity, and of prosperity's spiced cup. A tone of despondency, too, is visible in his letters to Dr. Moore:—"Not many months ago," he observes, "I knew no other employment than following the plough, nor could boast any thing higher than a distant acquaintance with a country clergyman. Mere greatness never embarrasses me; I have nothing to ask from the great, and I do not fear their judgment; but genius, polished by learning, and at its proper point of elevation in the eye of the world, this, of late, I frequently meet with, and tremble at its approach. I scorn the affectation of seeming modesty to cover self-conceit. That I have some merit I do not deny; but I see, with frequent wringings of heart, that the novelty of my character, and the honest national prejudice of my countrymen, have borne me to a height altogether untenable to my abilities."

Burns indicates the station to which he must soon descend still more plainly to another correspondent. The Earl of Buchan had advised him to visit the battle-fields of Caledonia, and, firing his fancy with deeds wrought by heroes, pour their deathless names in song. When the prophet retired to meditate in the desert, he was miraclously fed by

ravens; but the peer forgot to say how the poet was to be fed when musing on the fields of Stirling, Falkirk, and Bannockburn. That Heaven would send food while he produced song, seems not to have entered into his mind: for he says—"My Lord—in the midst of these enthusiastic reveries, a long-visaged, dry, moral-looking phantom strides across my imagination, and pronounces these emphatic words:—'I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence. Friend, I do not come to open the ill-closed wounds of your follies and misfortunes merely to give you pain. I have given you line upon line, and precept upon precept; and while I was chalking out to you the straight way to wealth and character, with audacious effrontery you have zig-zagged across the path, contemning me to my face. You know the consequences. Now that your dear-loved Scotia puts it in your power to return to the situation of your forefathers, will you follow these will-o'-wisp meteors of fancy and whim, till they bring you once more to the brink of ruin? I grant that the utmost ground you can occupy is but half a step from the veriest poverty—still it is half a step from it. You know how you feel at the iron gripe of ruthless oppression—you know how you bear the galling sneer of contumelious greatness. I hold you out the comforts of life, independence, and character, on the one hand; I tender you servility, dependence, and wretchedness on the other. I will not insult your understanding by bidding you make a choice.'"

He intimated his intention of returning to the plough still more publicly, when, in the new edition

of his works, April, 1787, he thus addressed the noblemen and gentlemen of Scotland :—"The poetic genius of my country found me as the prophetic bard Elijah did Elisha—at the plough—and threw her inspiring mantle over me. She bade me sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes and rural pleasures of my natal soil in my native tongue. I tuned my wild artless notes as she inspired. She whispered me to come to this ancient metropolis of Caledonia, and lay my songs under your honoured protection. I do not approach you, my lords and gentlemen, in the usual style of dedication to thank you for past favours ; that path is so hackneyed by prostituted learning, that honest rusticity is ashamed of it. Nor do I present this address with the venal soul of a servile author looking for a continuation of those favours. I was bred to the plough, and am independent." This bold language sounded strangely in noble ears. It was set down by some as approaching to arrogance—was regarded by others as the cant of independence ; or considered by a few as rude and vulgar, and remembered when the Poet looked for some better acknowledgment of his genius than a six-shilling subscription, or an invitation to dine. Silence, perhaps, would have been best ; but if it were necessary to speak, I cannot see that he could have spoken better.

The Poet spent the winter and spring of 1787 in Edinburgh, much after his own heart ; he loved company, and was not unwilling to shew that nature sometimes bestowed gifts against which rank and education could scarcely make good their sta-

tion. This was, perhaps, the unwisest course he could have pursued: a man with ten thousand a year will always be considered by the world around superior to a man whose wealth lies in his genius; the dullest can estimate what landed property is worth, but who can say what is the annual value of an estate which lies in the imagination? In fame there was no rivalry; and in station, what hope had a poet with the earth of his last turned furrow, still red on his shoon, to rival the Montgomerys, the Hamiltons, and the Gordons, with counties for estates, and the traditional éclat of a thousand years accompanying them? In the sight of the great and the far-descended, he was still a farmer, for whom the grass-market was the proper scene of action, and the husbandmen of the land the proper companions; his company was sought, not from a sense that genius had raised him to an equality with lords and earls, but from a wish to see how this wild man of the west would behave himself in the presence of ladies plumed and jewelled, and lords clothed in all the terrors of their wealth and titles.

The beautiful Duchess of Gordon was, in those days, at the head of fashion in Edinburgh; a wit herself, with some taste for music and poetry; she sought the acquaintance of Burns, and invited him to her parties. Lord Monboddo, equally accomplished and whimsical, gave parties, after what he called the classic fashion; he desired to revive the splendid suppers of the ancients, and placed on his tables the choicest wines, in decanters of a Grecian pattern, adorned with wreaths of flowers: painting

lent its attractions as well as music, while colours of all kinds were diffused from visible or invisible sources. Into scenes of this kind, and into company coldly polite and sensitively ceremonious, the brawny Bard of Doon-side, equally rash of speech and unceremonious in conduct, precipitated himself; but rich wines and lovely women, like the touch of the goddess which rendered Ulysses acceptable in the sight of princesses, brightened up the looks of the Poet, and inspired his tongue with that conquering eloquence which pleased fastidious ladies. In fine company, where it was imagined he would have failed, he triumphed. The fame of all these doings flew into Ayrshire.—"There is a great rumour here," said one of his friends, "concerning your intimacy with the Duchess of Gordon; I am really told that

"Cards to invite fly by thousands each night;"

and if you had one, I suppose there would be also 'bribes for your old secretary.' It seems that you are resolved to make hay while the sun shines, a good maxim to thrive by; you seemed to despise it while in this country, but probably some philosopher in Edinburgh has taught you better sense."

Of his own feelings on these occasions the Poet has said but little: Lord Monboddo's table had other attractions than wine called Falernian, and dishes like those praised in Latin verse. The beauty of his daughter is celebrated by Burns both in prose and poetry—

"Fair Burnet strikes the adoring eye,
Heaven's beauties on my fancy shine;
I see the Sire of Love on high,
And own his work indeed divine."

"I enclose you," he says to his friend Chalmers, "two poems which I have carded and spun since I passed Glenbuck. One blank in the Address to Edinburgh 'Fair B—' is the heavenly Miss Burnet, daughter of Lord Monboddo, at whose house I have had the honour to be more than once. There has not been any thing nearly like her in all the combinations of beauty, grace, and goodness, the great Creator has formed since Milton's Eve, on the first day of her existence."

Those who were afraid that amid feasting and flattery—the smiles of ladies and the applauding nods of their lords—Burns would forget himself, and allow the mercury of vanity to rise too high within him, indulged in idle fears. When he dined or supped with the magnates of the land, he never wanted a monitor to warn him of the humility of his condition. When the company arose in the gilded and illuminated rooms, some of the fair guests—perhaps

"Her grace,
Whose flambeaux flash against the morning skies,
And gild our chamber ceilings as they pass,"

took the hesitating arm of the Bard; went smiling to her coach, waved a graceful good-night with her jewelled hand, and, departing to her mansion, left him in the middle of the street to grope his way through the dingy alleys of the "gude town" to his obscure lodging, with his share of a deal table, a sanded floor, and a chaff bed, at eighteen pence a week. That his eyes were partly open to this we know; but he did not perceive that these invitations arose from a wish to relieve the ennui of a supper-

table, where the guests were all too well-bred to utter any thing strikingly original or boldly witty. Had Burns beheld the matter in this light, he would have sprung up like Wat Tinlinn when touched with the elfin bodkin; and overturning silver dishes, garlanded decanters, and shoving opposing ladies and staring lords aside, made his way to the plough-tail, and recommenced turning the furrows upon his cold and ungenial farm of Mossgiel.—"I have formed many intimacies and friendships here," he observes, in a letter to Dr. Moore; "but I am afraid they are all of a too tender construction to bear carriage a hundred and fifty miles. To the rich, the great, the fashionable, the polite, I have no equivalent to offer; and I am afraid my meteor appearance will by no means entitle me to a settled correspondence with any of you, who are the permanent lights of genius and literature." In these words he expressed his fears: they were prophetic.

While his volume was passing through the press, he added "The Brigs of Ayr," the "Address to Edinburgh," and one or two songs and small pieces. The first poem, "The Brigs of Ayr," seems to have been written for the two-fold purpose of giving a picture of old times and new, and honouring in rhyme those who befriended him on the banks of Doon; and, like Ballantyne, to whom it is inscribed, had

"Handed the rustic stranger up to fame."

There were two poems which some of his friends begged him to exclude from his new volume. On the score of delicacy, they requested the omission of

"The Louse;" and on that of loyalty and propriety, "The Dream." He defended the former, because of the moral with which the poem concludes, and maintained the propriety of the latter with such wit and indiscretion, that cautious divines and cool professors shrugged their shoulders, and talked of the folly of the sons of song. Mrs. Dunlop seems to have taken the matter much to heart.—"Your criticisms, madam," says the Poet, nettled a little by her remonstrance, "I understand very well, and could have wished to have pleased you better. You are right in your guess that I am not very amenable to counsel; I set as little by princes, lords, clergy, and critics, as all these respective gentry do by my bardship. I know what I may expect from the world by-and-bye—illiberal abuse, and, perhaps, contemptuous neglect."

In this sarcastic Dream there was much to amuse, and more to incense a king who endured advice as little as he did contradiction. The life of George the Third was pure and blameless; but the young princes of his house had already commenced their gay and extravagant courses. The song of the Bard is prophetic of the two elder ones:—

"For you, young Potentate of Wales,
I tell your Highness fairly,
Down pleasure's stream, wi' swelling sails,
I'm tauld ye're driving rarely;
But some day ye may gnaw yere nails,
An' curse your folly sairly,
That e'er ye brake Diana's pales,
Or rattled dice wi' Charlie.

"For you, Right Reverend Osnaburg,
Nane sets the lawn-sleeve better,
Although a ribbon at your lug
Wad been a dress completer:

As ye disown yon paughty dog
That bears the keys o' Peter,
Then swith! an' get a wife to hug,
Or trouth ye'll stain the mitre."

The "Address to Edinburgh" contains some noble verses. I have heard the description of the castle praised by one, whose genius all but exempted him from error:—

"There, watching high, the least alarms
Thy rough rude fortress gleams afar,
Like some bold veteran, gray in arms,
And marked with many a seamy scar:
The ponderous wall and massy bar,
Grim-rising o'er the rugged rock,
Have oft withstood assailing War,
And oft repelled the invader's shock."

When Burns told Mrs. Dunlop that he was determined to flatter no created being, she might have smiled; for in his "Earnest Cry and Prayer," he scattered praise as profusely as ever he scattered corn over his new-turned furrows. He who could see Demosthenes and Cicero in half-a-dozen northern members of Parliament, was inclined to flatter. Dempster, Cunningham, the Campbells,—

"And ane, a chap that's damned auld-farran,
Dundas his name,

were respectale debaters, but not eloquent. "Erskine, a spunkie Norland billie," came nearer to the comparison, and almost reconciles us to the lavish waste of honours on the others.

Burns's taste, which in all things resembled his genius, was almost always correct: he depended on its accuracy, and, as he used no words at random, was unwilling to alter aught. In the "Cottar's Saturday Night" he called Wallace the "unhappy," in allusion

to his fate; he hesitated now to change the word to "undaunted," in compliance with the criticism of Mrs. Dunlop.—"Your friendly advice," he says to that lady, "I will not give it the cold name of criticism, I receive with reverence. I have made some small alterations in what I before had printed. I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the literati here: but with them I sometimes find it necessary to claim the privilege of thinking for myself. The noble Earl of Glencairn, to whom I owe more than to any man, does me the honour of giving me his strictures; his hints, with respect to impropriety or indelicacy, I follow implicitly."

During the spring he sat to Alexander Nasmyth for his portrait; it was engraved by Beugo, whose boast it was that he had added to the merit of the likeness by inducing Burns to give him a sitting or two while he touched up the plate. He also allowed his profile to be taken in small: the brow is low, the hair hangs over it, and there is a short queue behind. The portrait by Nasmyth is the best, though wanting a little in massive vigour and the look of inspiration. He sat to whoever desired him, nor seemed to be aware that genius went to such works as well as to the manufacture of rhyme. He took pleasure in presenting proof impressions of this portrait to his friends: sometimes the gift was accompanied by verse, and it has been remarked that he imagined he looked very well on paper, and expected some notice to be taken of his face as well as of his poetry.

Of his verse, indeed, the notice was not always

taken that he desired. On the death of Dundas, of Arniston, Lord President of the Court of Session, he wrote a "Lamentation," forty lines in length. There are vigorous passages; the Poet affects an excess of grief; he complains to the hills, the plains, and the tempests of the too early removal of one who redressed wrongs, restrained violence, defeated fraud, and protected innocence. He copied the poem into a volume now before me, and presented it to Dr. Geddes, with the following note, describing the success of his "Lamentation."—"The foregoing poem has some tolerable lines in it, but the incurable wound of my pride will not suffer me to correct or even peruse it. I sent a copy of it with my best prose letter to the son of the great man, the theme of the piece, by the hands, too, of one of the noblest men in God's world, Alex. Wood, surgeon; when, behold! his solicitorship took no more notice of my poem or me than I had been a strolling fiddler who had made free with his lady's name over the head of a silly new reel! Did he think I looked for any dirty gratuity?"

Some of the anecdotes related of the Poet and his proof-sheets are amusing enough. When he had made up his mind to retain a line in the words of its original inspiration—such as, "When I look back on prospects drear,"—he stated his reasons briefly for refusing to make any change, and then sat, like his own heroine, "deaf as Ailsa Craig" to all persuasion or remonstrance. Nor did he lose his serenity of mind, though the way in which he unconsciously, perhaps, crumpled up the sheet in his

hand till he almost made it illegible, showed what was passing within him. It was on one of these occasions that a clergyman, stung with the irreverent way that Burns had handled the cloth in some of his earlier pieces, hazarded some stern remarks on the "Holy Fair;" not, he said, but that the poem was a clever picture, he only wished to show that it was not constructed according to the true rules of composition. The reverend censor did not acquit himself well in his perilous undertaking: the eye of the Poet began to lighten, and his lips to give a sort of twitching announcement that something sarcastic was coming. All present looked towards him; he spoke as they expected, saying, "No, by heaven, I'll not touch him—

'Dulness is sacred in a sound divine.'

—"I'll find you as apt a quotation as that," said the aggressor, "and from a poet whom I love more—

'Corbies and Clergy are a shot right kittle.'

Burns laughed, held out his hand, saying, "Then we are friends again."

He did not always come off so happily: on another occasion, Cromek tells us, that at a breakfast where a number of the literati were present, a critic, one of those fond of seeming very acute and wise, undertook to prove that Gray's Elegy in a Country Church-yard violated the essential rules of verse, and transgressed against true science, to which he held true poetry to be amenable. He failed, however, in explaining the nature of his scientific gauge, and he also failed in quoting the lines correctly, which he

proposed to censure; upon which Burns exclaimed with a great vehemence, "Sir, you have proved enough—you have proved that a man may be a good judge of poetry by square and rule, and, after all, a profound blockhead."

One of those critical scenes is well described by Professor Walker, who happened to be present; it occurred at the table of Dr. Blair, who was fond of hearing the Poet read his own verses.—"The aversion of Burns," he observes, "to adopt alterations which were proposed to him, after having fully satisfied his own taste, is apparent from his letters. In one passage, he says that he never accepted any of the corrections of the Edinburgh Literati, except in the instance of a single word. If his admirers should be desirous to know this 'single word,' I am able to gratify them, as I happened to be present when the criticism was made. It was at the table of a gentleman of literary celebrity, who observed, that in two lines of the 'Holy Fair,' beginning—

'For Moodie speels the holy door,
Wi' tidings of salvation.'

The last word, from his description of the preacher, ought to be *damnation*. This change, both embittering the satire, and introducing a word to which Burns had no dislike, met with his instant enthusiastic approbation. 'Excellent!' he exclaimed with great warmth, 'the alteration shall be made, and I hope you will allow me to say in a note, from whose suggestion it proceeds;' a request which the critic with great good humour, but with equal decision, refused." The Poet had not yet discovered what was

due to clerical decorum. I must copy another of Professor Walker's pictures of the Poet and the Edinburgh Literati :—

"The day after my introduction to Burns," says the Professor, "I supped in company with him at Dr. Blair's. The other guests were very few ; and as each had been invited chiefly to have an opportunity of meeting with the Poet, the Doctor endeavoured to draw him out, and make him the central figure of the groupe. Though he, therefore, furnished the greatest proportion of the conversation, he did no more than what he saw evidently was expected. Men of genius have often been taxed with a proneness to commit blunders in company, from that ignorance or negligence of the laws of conversation which must be imputed to the absorption of their thoughts on a favourite subject, or to the want of that daily practice in attending to the petty modes of behaviour which is incompatible with a studious life. From singularities of this sort, Burns was unusually free : yet, on the present occasion, he made a more awkward slip than any that are reported of the poets or mathematicians most noted for absence. Being asked from which of the public places he had received the greatest gratification, he named the high church, but gave the preference as a preacher to (the Rev. Robert Walker) the colleague (and most formidable rival) of our worthy entertainer—whose celebrity rested on his pulpit eloquence—in a tone so pointed and decisive as to throw the whole company into the most foolish embarrassment. The Doctor, indeed, with becoming self-command, en-

deavoured to relieve the rest by cordially seconding the encomium so injudiciously introduced; but this did not prevent the conversation from labouring under that compulsory effort which was unavoidable, while the thoughts of all were full of the only subject on which it was improper to speak. Of this blunder Burns must instantly have been aware, but he shewed the return of good sense by making no attempt to repair it. His secret mortification was indeed so great, that he never mentioned the circumstance until many years after, when he told me that his silence had proceeded from the pain which he felt in recalling it to his memory."

It must be mentioned to the honour of Blair, that this mortifying blunder had no influence over his well-regulated mind, and that he appears from his correspondence to have augmented rather than lessened his kindness for the Poet; but the strong sense of propriety which is visible in all that Blair ever said or wrote preserved him from this: though he probably thought of the Poet's preference when he first saw the fragment beginning,

"When Guildford good our pilot stood;"

and said, "Burns' politics always smell of the smithy." The Bard disapproved of the war waged with America; the world at large has shared in his feelings, and the sarcasm of the Doctor falls harmless on this little hasty, though not very happy production. It was likely to Blair that Burns glanced when, in reply to the question if the critical literati of Edinburgh had aided him with their opinions,—"The best of these gentlemen," said he, "are like

the wife's daughter in the west—they spin the thread of their criticism so fine, that it is fit for neither warp nor waft." He was never at a loss for illustrations drawn from domestic life or rural affairs.

Towards the close of April the subscription volume

"On wings of winds came flying all abroad,"

and was widely and warmly welcomed. All that coterie influence and individual exertion—all that the noblest or the humblest could do, was done to aid in giving it a kind reception; Creech, too, had announced it through the booksellers of the land, and it was soon diffused over the country, over the colonies, and wherever the language was spoken. The literary men of the south seemed even to fly a flight beyond those of the north. Some hesitated not to call him the northern Shakspeare; criticism at that period had not usurped the throne, and assumed the functions of genius; reviews were few in number, and moderate in influence, and followed opinion rather than led it. Had he lived in a latter day, with what a triumphant air of superiority the two leading critical journals would have crushed him! They would have agreed in that, though in nothing else, to trample down a spirit which wrote not as they wrote, and felt not as they felt; they would have assumed the air of high philosophy and searching science, and buried him as he did the Daisy under the weight of a deep-drawn critical furrow. The Whig of the north would have pounced on his poetical jacobitism; the Tory of the south upon his love of freedom; and both would have tossed him to the meaner

hounds of the kennel of criticism after they had dissected the soul and heart out of him. Much of this these journals tried to do at a later period when the Poet was low in the dust, and his fame as high as Heaven, and beyond their rancour or their spite.

While Burns lodged with his Mauchline friend Richmond, he kept good hours and sober company. In the course of the spring he became aquainted with William Nicol, one of the masters of the High-school, who lived in the Buccleugh-road, and found more suitable accommodation under his roof. This has been considered as a symptom that the keeping of good hours was growing irksome. The poverty of the Poet made him live frugally, nay, meanly, when he arrived in Edinburgh; but when money came pouring in, and gentlemen of note called on him, it did not become him to remain in an apartment of which he had but a share. I see little harm in this, or proof of increasing irregularity. Nicol, it is true, was of a quick, fierce temper—loose and wavering in religious opinions—fond of social company, and now and then indulged in excesses, though his situation required sobriety. Lockhart, who charges the imputed irregularities of Burns on the example of Nicol, supports his conclusion by the testimony of Heron. But Heron is a doubtful evidence; he was himself not only inclined to gross sensual indulgence, but has been regarded as one not at all solicitous about the truth.—"The enticements of pleasure," says Heron, "too often unman our virtuous resolution, even while we wear the air of rejecting them with a stern brow. We

resist, and resist, and resist; but at last suddenly turn and embrace the enchantress. The bucks of Edinburgh accomplished, in regard to Burns, that in which the boors of Ayrshire had failed. After residing some months in Edinburgh, he began to estrange himself, not altogether, but in some measure, from graver friends. Too many of his hours were now spent at the tables of persons who delighted to urge conviviality to drunkenness." Heron knew not what resolutions Burns formed, nor how much he resisted; and to push conviviality to intoxication was common in those days at the tables of the gentlemen of the north. The entertainer set down the quantity to be drunk, locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and the guests had either to swallow all his wine, or fill the landlord tipsy, steal the key, and escape.

Though Burns had expressed doubts to Lord Buchan on the prudence of a pennyless poet visiting the battle-fields, and fine natural scenery of Scotland, and intimated to many of his friends his resolution to return to the plough, he longed to pull broom on the Cowden-knowes, look at the Birks on the Braes of Yarrow, and see whether Flora smiled as sweetly on the Tweed as Crawford had represented. On the third of May he wrote to Dr. Blair—"I leave Edinburgh to-morrow morning, but could not go without troubling you with half a line, sincerely to thank you for the kindness, patronage, and friendship which you have shown me." The Doctor answered the farewell at once, and his words weigh those of Heron to the dust.—"Your

situation was indeed very singular; and, being brought out all at once from the shades of deepest privacy to so great a share of public notice and observation, you had to stand a severe trial. I am happy you have stood it so well; and, as far as I have known or heard, though in the midst of many temptations, without reproach to your character and behaviour. You are now, I presume, to retire to a more private walk of life, and I trust you will conduct yourself there with industry, prudence, and honour. You have laid the foundation for just public esteem. In the midst of those employments which your situation will render proper, you will not, I hope, neglect to promote that esteem by cultivating your genius, and attending to such productions of it, as may raise your character still higher. At the same time, be not in too great haste to come forward. Take time and leisure to improve and mature your talents; for, on any second production you give the world, your fate, as a poet, will very much depend." Burns, it is said, received this letter when about to mount his horse on his Border excursion; he read as far as I have transcribed, then crumpled up the communication, and thrusting it into his pocket, exclaimed, "Kindly said, Doctor; but a man's first-born book is often like his first-born babe—healthier and stronger than those which follow." In this mood he quitted Edinburgh, after a residence of five months and some odd days.

Burns was accompanied in this tour by Robert Ainslie, a young gentleman of talents and education, whose friendship his genius had procured, and who

is still living to enjoy the esteem and some of the applause of the world. The Poet directed his course by Lammermoor—whose hills he pronounced dreary in general, but at times picturesque—through Peebles, where he chaunted a stave of the old song of "The Wife of Peebles;" passed Coldstream, where he thought of Monk and his "reformadoe saints," and from Lanton-Edge gazed on the Merse, which he pronounced "glorious."

Of this tour, Burns kept a journal; it is now before me: the entries are brief, but generally to the point.—"May 6. Reach Berrywell; old Mr. Ainslie an uncommon character; his hobbies, agriculture, natural philosophy, and politics. In the first, he is unexceptionably the clearest-headed, best informed man I ever met with; in the other two, very intelligent. Mrs. Ainslie, an excellent, sensible, cheerful, amiable woman. Miss Ainslie, her person a little *en bon point*, but handsome, her face particularly; her eyes full of sweetness and good humour. She unites three qualities rarely to be found together: keen penetration, sly witty observation and remark, and the gentlest, most unaffected female modesty." Here he met with the author of "The Maid that tends the Goats," of whom he says,—"Mr. Dudgeon—a poet at times, a worthy, remarkable character, natural penetration, a great deal of information, some genius, and extreme modesty." In the pulpit of Dunse church he found a character of another stamp.—"Dr. Bowmaker, a man of strong lungs and pretty judicious remark," who preached a sermon against "obstinate sinners." "I am

found out," whispered the Poet to a friend, "wherever I go."

On reaching the Tweed, Ainslie requested Burns to pass the stream, that he might say he had been in England. The following brief entry is all the memoranda he makes of this event:—"Coldstream—went over to England—glorious river Tweed, clear and majestic." His companion has enabled me to complete the picture.—"As soon as the Poet reached the English side he took off his hat, knelt down, and with extreme emotion, and a countenance rapt and inspired, prayed for, and blest Scotland, by pronouncing aloud the two concluding verses of "The Cottar's Saturday Night." At Lenel-House he drank tea with Brydone the traveller; of this he makes a brief record.—"Mr. Brydone is a man of an excellent heart, kind, joyous, and benevolent; but from his situation, past and present, an admirer of every thing that bears a splendid title, or that possesses a large estate; Mrs. Brydone, a most elegant woman in her person and manners; the tones of her voice remarkably sweet." He slept at Coldstream, and then proceeded to Kelso, of which he pronounced the situation charming.—"There are," said he, "enchanting views and prospects on both sides of the river, particularly the Scotch side."

He walked on to the ruins of Roxburgh Castle; and wrote in his journal:—"A holly-bush growing where James II. of Scotland was accidentally killed by the bursting of a cannon. A small old religious ruin, and a fine old garden planted by

the religious, rooted out and destroyed by an English Hottentot, a *maître d'hôtel* of the duke's, a Mr. Cole. Climate and soil of Berwickshire, and even Roxburghshire, superior to Ayrshire; turnip and sheep husbandry their great improvements. Mr. M'Dowal of Caverton Mill, sold his sheep, ewe, and lamb together, at two guineas a piece. They wash their sheep before shearing; seven or eight pounds of washen wool in a fleece. Low markets, consequently low rents; fine lands not above sixteen shillings a Scotch acre; magnificence of farmers and farm-houses." On his way up the Tiviot and the Jed, he visited an old gentleman, whose boast it was that he possessed an arm-chair which had belonged to Thomson the poet. Burns reverently examined the relique, could scarcely be prevailed to sit in it, and seemed to feel inspiration from its touch.

In Jedburgh, the Poet found much to interest him.—"Go about two miles out of the town to a roup of parks; meet a polite soldier-like gentleman, a Captain Rutherford, who had been many years in the wilds of America, a prisoner among the Indians. Charming romantic situation of Jedburgh, with gardens and orchards intermingled among the houses. Fine old ruins; a once magnificent cathedral and strong castle. All the towns here have the appearance of old rude grandeur, but the people extremely idle. Jed, a fine romantic little river." Burns dined with Captain Rutherford; returned to Jedburgh, was introduced to Mr. Potts, writer, whom he pronounced a clever man; and to Mr. Somerville, the mi-

nister of the place; "a man," said he, "and a gentleman, but sadly addicted to punning."

Here he met with something not unlike a love adventure: in one of his walks he was accompanied by several ladies:—"Miss Hope, a pretty girl, fond of laughing and fun; Miss Lindsay, a good-humoured, amiable girl, handsome, and extremely graceful; beautiful hazel eyes full of spirit, and sparkling with delicious moisture; an engaging face, *un tout ensemble*, that speaks her of the first order of female minds; her sister, a bonnie, strappan, rosy, sonsie lass." The Poet would, perhaps, have contented himself with silently admiring this dangerous companion; but two venerable spinsters persecuted him so with their conversation, that he took refuge with Miss Lindsay, who was touched, as he imagined, with his attentions.—"My heart," he says in his record, "is thawed into melting pleasure after being so long frozen up in the Greenland bay of indifference, amid the noise and nonsense of Edinburgh. *Nota Bene.*—The Poet within a point and a half of being damnably in love; I am afraid my bosom is still nearly as much tinder as ever; I find Miss Lindsay would soon play the devil with me." He seems ready to burst into song as he proceeds with his journal.—"Took farewell of Jedburgh with some melancholy, disagreeable sensations. Jed, pure be thy chrystal streams and hallowed thy sylvan banks! Sweet Isabella Lindsay, may peace dwell in thy bosom uninterrupted, except by the tumultuous throbbings of rapturous love! That love-enkindling eye must beam on another,

not on me: that graceful form must bless another's arms, not mine." Before he departed, he gave this young lady a present of his portrait, and was waited on by the magistrates and handsomely presented with the freedom of the town.

He made an excursion to Wauchope, to see his fair correspondent, Mrs. Scott; the laird, he said, was shrewd in his farming matters, and frequently stumbled in conversation on a strong, rather than a good thing; the lady had sense, taste, and a decision peculiar to female authors.—"Kelso; dine with the Farmer's Club; all gentlemen talking of high matters; each of them keeps a hunter, from thirty to fifty pounds value, and attends the fox-huntings in the county. Go out with Mr. Ker, one of the club, and a friend of Mr. Ainslie's, to lie; Mr. Ker, a most gentlemanly, clever fellow; a widower, with some fine children; his mind and manner astonishingly like my dear old friend, Robert Muir, in Kilmarnock; he offers to accompany me on my English tour: dine with Sir Alexander Don; clever, but far from being a match for his divine lady."

On the thirteenth of May, Burns visited Dryburgh Abbey, and though the weather was wild, spent an hour among the ruins, since hallowed by the dust of Scott; he crossed the Leader, and went up the Tweed to Melrose, which he calls a "far-famed glorious ruin." Though desirous of musing on battle-fields, he seems to have left Ancram-moor unheeded; nor did he pause to look at the spot where

"Gallant Cessford's heart-blood dear
Reeked on dark Elliot's border spear."

He sat for some time, indeed, among the broom of the Cowden-knowes, and had a chat with the Souters of Selkirk, concerning the field of Flodden; but no one seems to have told him of Huntly-burn, where True Thomas flirted with the Fairy Queen; nor of Philiphaugh, where Montrose and his cavaliers were routed by Lesly; nor of Carterhaugh, made memorable in song by the fine ballad of Tamlane. He was not in a pastoral mood; for he says briefly, "The whole country hereabouts, both on Tweed and Ettrick, remarkably stony." In the inspiration necessary for verse, there is none of the spirit of prophecy: he passed over some broken ground and peat-haggs, where his mare, Jenny Geddes, kept her feet with difficulty, unconscious that on that desolate spot the Towers of Abbotsford would, ere long, arise, and those immortal Romances be written, which have made his own the second name in Scottish literature.

The weather having settled, the Poet visited Inverleithing, where, says he, I dined and drank some "Galloway whey," and saw Elibanks and Elibraes on the other side of the Tweed. In the morning he continued his journey and found other places made famous in tale and song.—"Dine at a country inn, kept by a miller in Earlston, the birth-place and residence of the celebrated Thomas the Rhymer, and saw the ruins of his castle." He now shaped his course to Dunse, where he met "the Rev. Mr. Smith, a famous punster, and Mr. Meikle, a celebrated mechanic, and inventor of the threshing-mills." Berwick he looked on as "an idle town,

rudely picturesque." At Eyemouth, he loved the look of the sea and shore so much, that he took a sail after dinner; here he was made a royal arch mason of St. Abb's lodge.—"Sir James Hall of Dunglass, having heard," he says, "of my being in the neighbourhood, comes to Mr. Sheriffs to breakfast; takes me to see his fine scenery on the stream of Dunglass. Dunglass, the most romantic, sweet place I ever saw. Sir James and his lady, a pleasant happy couple; he points out a walk, for which he has an uncommon respect, as it was made by an aunt of his to whom he owes much." Burns seems to have fallen into something of a cynical mood on leaving the author of the ingenious work on the "Origin of Gothic Architecture." A lady, of whose charms and conversation he was no admirer, resolved to accompany him to Dunbar; the description is severe and clever.—"She mounts an old cart-horse, as huge and lean as a house; a rusty old side-saddle without girth or stirrup, but fastened on with an old pillion-girth; herself as fine as hands could make her, in cream-coloured riding clothes, hat and feather, &c. I, ashamed of my situation, ride like the devil, and almost shake her to pieces."

On reaching Dunbar he notes in his journal—"Passed through the most glorious corn country I ever saw. Dine with Provost Fall, an eminent merchant; Mrs. Fall a genius in painting; clever in the arts and sciences, without a consummate assurance of her own abilities." The sarcastic humour of the Poet continues: he meets a lady—"a clever woman, but no brent new; with tolerable

pretensions to remark and wit, while time had blown the blushing bud of bashful modesty into the full-blossomed flower of easy confidence." He likewise meets "a fellow whose looks are of that kind which deceived me in a gentleman at Kelso, and has often deceived me; a goodly, handsome figure and face, which incline one to give them credit for parts which they have not." The cloud now begins to pass away. "In good time comes an antidote;" he reached Dunse, and "found Miss Ainslie, the amiable, the sensible, the good-humoured and sweet Miss Ainslie, all alone at Berrywell. How well-bred, how frank, how good she is! Charming Rachel! may thy bosom never be wrung by the evils of this life of sorrows, or by the villany of this world's sons!"

Burns was now joined by Mr. Ker, and set off on a jaunt into England; sudden illness seized him by the way; the entry in his journal is characteristic.—"I am taken extremely ill, with strong feverish symptoms, and have a servant to watch me all night. Embittering remorse scares my fancy at the gloomy forebodings of death. I am determined to live for the future in such a manner as not to be scared at the approach of Death: I am sure I could meet Him with indifference, but for the something beyond the grave." He recovered his health and spirits, and went to see the roup of an unfortunate farmer's stock. He surveyed the scene with a darkening brow and a troubled eye.—"Rigid economy, and decent industry," he said, "do you preserve me from being the principal dramatis persona in such a scene of

horror. This day I feel myself warm with sentiments of gratitude to the great Preserver of men, who has kindly restored me to health and strength." He now recommenced his tour.

"Sunday, May 27.—Cross Tweed, and traverse the moors, through a wild country, till I reach Alnwick-Castle. Monday—Come through bye-ways to Warkworth, where we dine. Warkworth, situated very picturesque with Coquet Island, a small rocky spot, the seat of an old monastery, facing it a little in the sea; and the small but romantic river Coquet running through it. Sleep at Morpeth, a pleasant-enough little town, and on next day to Newcastle." The Poet seems to have found little in Newcastle to interest him: tradition says, that at dinner he was startled at seeing the meat served before the soup. "This," said his facetious entertainer, "is in obedience to a Northumberland maxim, which enjoins us to eat the beef before we sup the broth, lest the hungry Scotch make an inroad and snatch it." Burns laughed heartily. On leaving Newcastle he rode through Hexham, and on to Longtown, which he reached on a hiring day.—"I am uncommonly happy," he says, "to see so many young folks enjoying life." Here he parted with his friend Ker; and, arriving at Carlisle, sat down and gave a brief account of his jaunt, to his friend Nicol, in very particular Scotch; saying, in conclusion, "I'll be in Dumfries the morn, gif the beast be to the fore, an' the branks bide hale. God be wi' you, Willie. Amen."

From Carlisle he went along the coast to Annan and Dumfries.—" I am quite charmed," he says, " with Dumfries folk. Mr. Burnside, the clergyman, in particular, is a man whom I shall ever gratefully remember; and his wife—simplicity, elegance, good sense, and good humour, are the constituents of her manner and heart." Burns next proceeded to Dalswinton, and walked over the unoccupied farms; but, though he expressed himself pleased with the land and the general aspect of the valley, he declined for the time the handsome offer of a four-nineteen years lease on his own terms; and, saying he would return in autumn, departed. " From my view of the lands," he said in a letter to Nicol, " and Mr. Millar's reception of my bardship, my hopes in that business are rather mended, but still they are but slender."

The friends of Burns considered this an agricultural rather than a poetic tour. It partook of the nature of both; remarks on varieties of soil; rotation of crop; and on land, pastoral or cultivated, mingle curiously with sketches of personal character, notices of visits paid to hoary ruins, or to scenes memorable in song. His curiosity was excited: his heart a little touched, but neither the fine scenery, nor the lovely women, produced any serious effect on his muse. The sole poetic fruit of the excursion is an epistle to Creech, dated Selkirk, May 13, and written, he says, " Nearly extempore, in a solitary inn, after a miserable wet day's riding." It is, in its nature, complimentary; the dripping

sky, and "the worst inn's worst room," induced the Poet to make light of

"The Eden scenes on crystal Jed,
And Ettrick banks, now roaring red,"

and think of the wit and the wine of Edinburgh, and see in imagination, philosophers, poets,

"And toothy critics by the score,
In bloody row,"

crowding to the levee of the patronizing bibliopole.

After an absence of six busy, and to him eventful months, Burns returned to Mossgiel the 8th of June, 1787. His mother, a woman of few words, met him with tears of joy in her eyes at the threshold, saying, "Oh, Robert!" He had left her hearth in the darkness of night, and he came back in the brightness of day; he went away an obscure and almost nameless adventurer, and he returned with a name, round which there was already a halo not destined soon to be eclipsed. In his own eyes, his early aspirations after fame seemed as hopeless as "the blind groping of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave;" he had now made his way to the mountain-top, his pipe was at his lips, and all the country round was charmed with his melody. The last lines which he expected to measure in Caledonia were not yet uttered, and he who, to use his own words, was lately

"Darkling derned in glens and hallows,
And hunted, as was William Wallace,
By constables, these blackguard fallows,
And bailies baith,"

was now a poet of the highest order; the fit and accepted companion of the proud and the lordly, with

gold, the fruits of his genius, in his pocket, and more promised by the muse. Those who formerly were cold or careless, now approached to praise and to welcome him; while his mother, who never imagined that aught good could come from idle rhyme, received all as something dropt from heaven, and rejoiced in the fame of her son.

He remained at home some ten or twelve days. He went little out. His acquaintance with Jean Armour was not at that time renewed, nor did he visit more than one friend or two; his chief occupation was in writing to his literary acquaintances, and discussing with his brother Gilbert the chances of success in agriculture. He was restless—he was not satisfied with his position in society; he neither belonged to the high nor to the low. Rank, he felt, had taken his hand coldly to squeeze and to drop it, while his rustic brethren looked upon him as having risen above their condition. The feelings which agitated him are forcibly—nay, darkly, expressed in a letter to Nicol, dated Mauchline, June 18:—"I never, my friend, thought mankind very capable of any thing generous; but the stateliness of the patricians in Edinburgh, and the servility of my plebian brethren since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species. I have bought a pocket Milton, which I carry perpetually about with me, in order to study the sentiments—the dauntless magnanimity—the intrepid unyielding independence—the desperate, daring, and noble defiance of hardship in that great personage Satan. 'Tis true I have just now a little cash; but

I am afraid the star that hitherto has shed its malignant purpose-blasting rays full in my zenith—that noxious planet, so baleful in its influence to the rhyming trade, I much dread it is not yet beneath my horizon. Misfortune clogs the path of human life; the poetic mind finds itself miserably deranged in, and unfit for, the walks of business. Add to all that, thoughtless follies and hare-brained whims, like so many *ignes fatui*, eternally diverging from the right line of sober discretion, sparkle with step-bewitching blaze in the idly-gazing eyes of the poor heedless bard, till pop 'he falls, like Lucifer, never to hope again.'" In this mood he left Mauchline, and hurried to Edinburgh.

In some of the doings of Burns during the latter half of the year 1787, we see a mind "unfitted with an aim;" he moved much about without any visible purpose in his motions. We have now to follow him northward in three successive and hurried excursions, in which he passed into the Western Highlands, examined Stirlingshire, and penetrated eastward as far as Inverness. In his first tour he was mounted on Jenny Geddes, named after the devout virago who threw a stool at the Dean of Edinburgh's head—perhaps the lady celebrated in song:—

"Jenny Geddes was the gossip
Put the gown upon the Bishop."

Of this journey we know little that is pleasant. Burns seems to have been possessed with a spirit of ill-humour during the greater part of the expedition. He first bent his steps to Carron, and, desiring to see the celebrated Foundry, was repulsed from the

gate, rudely as he thought; for he put his complaint into no very decorous language:—

"We came na' here to view your warks
In hopes to be mair wise,
But only, lest we gang to hell,
It might be nae surprise."

He then proceeded to Stirling. The Poet was an intense lover of his country and her glory: the displeasure with which the people of Scotland regarded the Union which had removed all visible symbols of power and independence, was not in those days subsided; and, when he looked on the Hall where princes once ruled and Scottish parliaments assembled, and reflected that it was laid in ruins by a prince of the house of Hanover, he gave vent to his proper indignation in improper verse:—

"Here Stuarts once in glory reigned,
And laws for Scotland's weal ordained;
But now unroofed their palace stands,
Their sceptre's swayed by other hands;
The injured Stuart line is gone,
A race outlandish fills their throne."

Two other lines followed, forming the bitter point to the epigram—they were remembered in after-days to the Poet's injury. He seems not to have been very sensible at that time of his imprudence;—for some one said, "Burns, this will do you no good."—"I shall reprove myself," he said; and wrote these aggravating words:

"Rash mortal, and slanderous poet, thy name
Shall no longer appear in the records of fame;
Dost not know that old Mansfield, who writes like the Bible,
Says the more 'tis a truth, Sir, the more 'tis a libel?"

Such satire was not likely to pass without re-

monstrance: Hamilton, of Gladsmuir, wrote a reply, wherein he lamented that a mind,

> "Where Genius lights her brightest fires,"

should disdain truth, and law, and justice;

> "And skulking with a villain's aim,
> Thus basely stab his monarch's fame."

There are few who will not concur in the propriety of this rebuke. The writer, however, resolved to be prophet, as well as poet and priest:—

> "Yes, Burns, 'tis o'er—thy race is run,
> And shades receive thy setting sun:
> These few rash lines shall damn thy name,
> And blast thy hopes of future fame."

Poetic sarcasms on ruling powers may keep a man from rising in the church where princes are patrons, but they have no influence on his ascent up Parnassus: of this no one was more aware than Burns, nor was he long at a loss for an answer to the minister of Gladsmuir,

> "Like Esop's lion, Burns says, sore I feel
> All others scorn—but damn that ass's heel."

After leaving Stirling, we hear no more of him till, having traversed a portion of the Western Highlands, and passed through Inverary, he makes his appearance at Arrochar, and thus addresses Ainslie: "I write you this on my tour through a country where savage streams tumble over savage mountains; thinly overspread with savage flocks, which starvingly support as savage inhabitants. My last stage was Inverary—to-morrow night's stage, Dunbarton." This was on the 28th of June. At Inverary, he found the principal inn filled by a visiting party to the Duke of Argyle, who engrossed

all the attention of the landlord; and the poor Bard, mounted on a sorry mare, without friend or lackey, was neglected. He avenged himself with unmerited bitterness:—

"Whoe'er he be who sojourns here,
I pity much his case,
Unless he's come to wait upon
The lord their god, his Grace:
There's naething here but Highland pride,
But Highland cauld and hunger,
If Providence has sent me here
'Twas surely in his anger."

If the Poet wrote these lines on the window of the inn, he must have administered the spur at his departure with little mercy to the sides of Jenny Geddes; for Highland wrath is as hot as Highland hospitality.

Burns recovered his composure of mind before reaching Dumbarton; he had, moreover, fallen into very pleasant company. Having dined with a hospitable Highland gentleman, he was introduced to a merry party.—"Our dancing," says the Bard, "was none of the French or English insipid formal movements. The ladies sung Scotch songs like angels; then we flew at "Bab at the bowster," "Tullochgorum," "Loch-Erroch side," &c., like midges sporting in the mottie sun. When the dear lasses left us, we ranged round the bowl till the good-fellow hour of six; except a few minutes that we went to pay our devotions to the glorious lamp of day peering over the towering top of Benlomond. We all kneeled. Our worthy landlord's son held the bowl, each man a full glass in his hand, and I, as priest,

repeated some rhyming nonsense: like Thomas the Rhymer's prophecies, I suppose."

These highland high-jinks were not yet concluded. After a few hours' sleep—a good dinner at another good fellow's house, Burns mounted his mare, and, accompanied by two friends, rode along Lochlomond side on his way to Dumbarton.—"We found ourselves," he says "'no very fou, but gaily yet,' and I rode soberly, till by came a highlandman at the gallop, on a tolerably good horse, but which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather. We scorned to be out-galloped by a highlandman, so off we started, whip-and-spur. My companions fell badly a-stern; but my old mare, Jenny Geddes, one of the Rosinante family, strained past the highlandman, in spite of all his efforts with the hair-halter. Just as I was passing him, Donald wheeled his horse, as if to cross before me to mar my progress, when down came his horse, and threw his rider's breekless bottom in a clipt hedge, and down came Jenny Geddes over all, and my bardship between her and the highlandman's horse. Jenny trode over me with such cautious reverence. As for the rest of my acts and my wars, and all my wise sayings, and why my mare was called Jenny Geddes, they shall be recorded, in a few weeks, in the chronicles of your memory."

Burns returned to Mauchline by the way of Glasgow, and remained with his mother during the month of July. He renewed his intercourse with the family of the Armours. Jean's heart still beat tenderly towards "the plighted husband of her youth;" and Burns, much as his pride was wound-

ed, could not help regarding her with affection. He had, as yet, no very defined notion of what he should do in the world: he trusted to time and chance. "I have yet fixed," he thus writes to a friend, "on nothing with respect to the serious business of life. I am just as usual—a rhyming, mason-making, raking, aimless fellow. However, I shall somewhere have a farm soon—I was going to say a wife, too; but that must never be my blessed lot. I am but a younger son of the house of Parnassus; and, like other younger sons of great families, I may intrigue, if I choose to run all risks, but must not marry."

It is plain that Burns regarded the burning of his marriage lines as not only destroying all evidence of his engagements with Jean Armour, but as a deliberate revocation of vows on her part which released him from the responsibilities of wedlock. Nay, this seems to have been the notion of graver men. The Poet thus writes to David Bryce, 17th July, 1786:—"Poor Jean is come back to Mauchline. I went to call for her, but her mother forbade me the house. I have already appeared publicly in church, and was indulged in the liberty of standing in my own seat. I do this to get a certificate as a bachelor, which Mr. Auld has promised me." In this I see the anxiety of Mr. Armour to obliterate all traces of the marriage, and the concurrence, at least of the Poet in the proceeding. Robert Burns and Jean Armour might permit their friends to regard them as unmarried, and, if such was their own pleasure, call themselves single; but their children were not, I apprehend, affected in their claims to legitimacy by

this disavowal on the part of their parents; the law would, I think, enforce their rights for them, in spite of the disclamation of both father and mother. Nay, I suspect the law refuses to recognize any other dissolution of wedlock than what is effected by civil or ecclesiastical authority. However this may be, the Poet affected all the freedom of speech and action which custom concedes to bachelors, and seemed oftener than once on the point of unwittingly agitating the question, whether an Ayrshire lass or an Edinburgh lady, should plead a property in his hand.

The second excursion of Burns towards the north was made in the company of Dr. Adair, of Harrowgate, whom chance made into a comrade, and who fortunately kept the particulars of the journey in his memory. He set out early in August from Edinburgh, passed through Linlithgow, and made his appearance at the gates of Carron Foundry—they were opened with an apology for former rudeness, which mollified the bard; and he beheld in their tremendous furnaces and broiling labours a resemblance to the cavern of the Cyclops. A resemblance of a less classical kind had before occurred to him. From Carron he hurried to Stirling, that he might break and replace the pane of glass in the inn window on which he had written those rash and injurious lines already alluded to; and then he proceeded to visit Ramsay of Ochtertyre, whose romantic residence on the Teith he admired greatly, and whose conversation, rife as it was with knowledge of Scottish literature, was altogether after his own

heart. This visit was brief, but full of interest. The laird of Ochtertyre had a memory filled with old traditions and old songs. He had written some ingenious essays on the olden poetry, displaying feeling and taste ; and, moreover, the walls of his house were hung with long Latin inscriptions, much to the wonder of the unlearned Bard of Kyle.

They discussed fit topics for the muse, a rustic drama, and Scottish Georgics. "What beautiful landscapes of rural life and manners," says Ramsay, "might not have been expected from a pencil so faithful and forcible as his, which could have exhibited scenes as familiar and interesting as those in the Gentle Shepherd, which every one who knows our swains in their unadulterated state instantly recognizes as true to nature. But to have executed either of these plans, steadiness and abstraction from company were wanted, not genius." Of Burns' power of conversation, he says, "I have been in the company of many men of genius, some of them poets, but never witnessed such flashes of intellectual brightness as from him—the impulse of the moment—sparks of celestial fire." It is painful to think that the celestial sayings of the Poet have vanished from men's memories, while the less mental and grosser things remain. He continued two days on the Teith, and then proceeded to Harvieston, where he was received with much respect and kindness by Mrs. Hamilton and her daughters. Here he saw Charlotte Hamilton for the first time.—"She is not only beautiful," he thus wrote to her brother Gavin, "but lovely. Her form is elegant, her features not re-

gular, but they have the smile of sweetness, and the settled complacency of good nature in the highest degree; and her complexion, now that she has recovered her wonted health, is equal to Miss Burnet's. After the exercise of our riding to the Falls, Charlotte was exactly Dr. Donne's mistress:—

> 'Her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
> That one would almost say her body thought.'

Her eyes are fascinating; at once expressive of good sense, tenderness, and a noble mind."

The account of Dr. Adair supplies some circumstances which Burns has omitted. "We made excursions," he says, "to various parts of the surrounding scenery, particularly Castle-Campbell, the ancient seat of the family of Argyle; and the famous cataract of the Devon, called the Cauldron-Linn; and the Rumbling-Bridge, a single broad arch thrown by the devil, if tradition is to be believed, across the river at about the height of a hundred feet above its bed. A visit to Mrs. Bruce, of Clackmannan, a lady above ninety, the lineal descendant of that race which gave the Scottish throne its brightest ornament, interested his feelings powerfully. This venerable dame, with characteristic dignity, informed me, on my observing that I believed she was descended from the family of Robert Bruce, that Robert Bruce was sprung from her family. She was in possession of the hero's helmet and two-handed sword, with which she conferred on Burns and myself the honour of knighthood, observing that she had a better right to confer that title than *some people*.

Her political tenets were as Jacobitical as the Poet's, a conformity which contributed not a little to the cordiality of our reception. She gave us as her first toast after dinner, 'Awa uncos', or away strangers; who these strangers are you will readily understand." At Dumfermline, on visiting the abbey church, the Poet persuaded Adair to represent a sinner on the stool of repentance, while he, in the character of priest, admonished him from the pulpit on the enormity of his transgression, and the frequency of its occurrence. In the churchyard he knelt down, and kissed with much fervour the broad flag-stone which covered the grave of the great restorer of Scottish independence, Robert Bruce, and execrated the want of respect shown by the local authorities to the dust of the first of heroes. They returned to Edinburgh by the way of Kinross and Queensferry.

It was the complaint of the Harvieston ladies that Burns broke out into no poetic raptures on visiting the magnificence of the Cauldron-Linn, or the melancholy splendour of Castle-Campbell, and because he was next to silent, they concluded he had no taste for the picturesque. Other reasons may be assigned for the moderation of his raptures. He disliked to be tutored in matters of taste, and could not endure that one should run shouting before him whenever any fine object appeared. On one occasion of this kind, a lady at the Poet's side said, "Burns, have you nothing to say of this?"—"Nothing, madam," he replied, glancing at the leader of the party, "for an ass is braying over it." One even-

ing, Lockhart relates, as the Poet passed near the Carron Foundry when the furnaces were casting forth flames, his companion exclaimed, "Look, Burns, look! good heavens, look, look—what a glorious sight!"—"Sir," said the Bard, clapping spurs to Jenny Geddes, "I would not look! look! at your bidding, were it into the mouth of hell." When he visited Creehope-Linn, in Dumfrieshire, at every turn of the stream and bend of the wood he was called loudly upon to admire the shelving sinuosities of the burn, and the caverned splendour of its all but inaccessible banks—it was thought by those with him that he did not show rapture enough—"I could not admire it more, sir," said the Poet, "if He who made it were to ask me to do it."

There were other reasons for the Poet being "so bashful and so grave" in the company of the Harvieston ladies. From his frequent praise in prose, from his admiration in song, and the general tone of his conversation, I cannot avoid concluding that he thought more than favourably of Charlotte Hamilton. In the presenee of female loveliness, Burns could see no landscape beauty; with Charlotte beside him, the Cauldron-Linn seemed an ordinary cascade, and Castle-Gloom not at all romantic. There is no positive evidence that he paid his addresses to the "Fairest Maid of Devon Banks;" but he did much to render himself acceptable, and as an oblique way of making his approach, he strove, and not without success, to merit the good opinion of her companion, Margaret Chalmers, a young lady of beauty as well as sense, now Mrs. Hay of Edinburgh. I can

give but an imperfect account of the progress of the Poet's passion, for some twelve or fourteen of his most carefully written and gently expressed letters were, in an evil hour, thrown into the fire by Charlotte Hamilton, and all the record we have is his songs and what is contained in his correspondence with Margaret Chalmers.

Of the lyrical lime-twigs which the Poet laid on the banks of the Devon, he gives the following account: "Talking of Charlotte, I must tell her that I have, to the best of my power, paid her a poetic compliment. The air is admirable; true old Highland; it was the tune of a Gaelic song which an Inverness lady sung me, and I was so charmed with it, that I begged her to write me a set of it from her singing, for it had never been set before. I am fixed that it shall go in Johnson's next number, so Charlotte and you need not spend your precious time in contradicting me. I won't say the poetry is first rate, though I am convinced it is very well; and what is not always the case with compliments to ladies, it is not only sincere but just." The Poet alludes to his sweet and graceful song, "The Banks of the Devon." The praise is figurative:—

"Let Bourbon exult in his gay gilded lilies,
And England triumphant display her proud rose,
A fairer than either adorns the green vallies,
Where Devon, sweet Devon, meandering flows."

Having secured her immortality in song, and probably observed the coldness with which his most harmonious compliments were received, Burns complains obliquely of Charlotte's want of sympathy, by imagining that his words have no longer any

fascination for woman. "My rhetoric," he says, "seems quite to have lost its effect on the lovely half of mankind; I have seen the day, but that is 'a tale of other years.' In my conscience, I believe, that my heart has been so often on fire, that it is absolutely vitrified. I look on the sex with something like the admiration with which I regard the starry sky in a frosty December night; I admire the beauty of the Creator's workmanship; I am charmed with the wild, but graceful eccentricity of their motions, and wish them good night." He says in another letter, that he has a heart for friendship, if not for love, and deserves the tender sympathy of the two blooming spinsters. "Charlotte and you are just two favourite resting places for my soul in her wanderings through the weary, thorny wilderness of this world. God knows I am ill-fitted for the struggle; I glory in being a poet, and want to be thought a wise man; I would fain be generous, and I desire to be rich. After all, I am afraid I am a lost subject. Some folk hae a hantle o' fauts, but I'm a ne'er-do-weel."

As the correspondence proceeded, Burns was overset by a tipsy coachman, and one of his legs dangerously bruised. He thinks of Harvieston and the condolence of beauty. "I am under the care of a surgeon," he says, "with a bruised limb extended on a cushion, and the tints of my mind vying with the livid horror preceding a midnight thunder-storm. I have taken, tooth and nail, to the bible; it is really a glorious book; I would give my best song to my worst foe, I mean the merit of making it, to have you and Charlotte by me. You are angelic creatures,

and would pour oil and wine into my wounded spirit." Charlotte Hamilton, to whose ear and heart most of these fine things were addressed, was not to be moved by the muse; she was probably aware of the more than equivocal situation in which the Poet stood with regard to Jean Armour, and she felt a growing regard for Adair, whom Burns had introduced. This, in some measure, accounts for the indifferent success of the Poet, in a matter on which he seems to have set his heart, and also for the destruction of his letters.

The third and last tour of Burns was performed in the company of Nicol. The master of the High-school had made himself agreeable to the Poet by an intrepid mode of expression, and an admiration of whatever was hairbrained and sentimental. He was

"A fiery ether-cap; a fractious chiel,"

and altogether one of those companions who require prudent management. They commenced their tour in a post-chaise, on the 25th of August, 1787. Burns kept a journal of the journey: it is now before me, and begins thus:—"I leave Edinburgh for a northern tour, in company with my good friend Mr. Nicol, whose originality of humour promises me much entertainment. Linlithgow, a fertile improved county. West Lothian;—the more elegance and luxury among the farmers, I always observe, in equal proportion, the rudeness and stupidity of the peasantry. For this, among other reasons, I think that a man of romantic taste—'a man of feeling'—will be better pleased with the poverty, but intelligent

minds of the peasantry in Ayrshire, than the opulence of a club of Merse farmers, when at the same time he considers the vandalism of their plough-folks. I carry this idea so far that an uninclosed, half-improved country, is to me actually more agreeable, and gives me more pleasure as a prospect than a country cultivated like a garden." The Poet refused to look on the world through the coloured spectacles of political economists; he preferred happiness to wealth.

The soil about Linlithgow he considered as light and thin; the town bore all the marks of ancient grandeur, and the situation he declared to be retired and rural.—"The old Royal Palace," says his journal, "is a tolerable fine but melancholy ruin, sweetly situated on a small elevation by the brink of a loch. Shown the room where the beautiful injured Mary Queen of Scots was born. A pretty good old Gothic church, with the infamous stool of repentance standing, in the old Romish way, on a lofty situation. What a poor pimping business is a Presbyterian place of worship; dirty, narrow, and squalid; stuck in the corner of old Popish grandeur, such as Linlithgow, and much more Melrose. Ceremony and show, if judiciously thrown in, absolutely necessary for the bulk of mankind, both in civil and religious matters." He continues his tour, and his remarks—"Pleasant view of Dumfermline, and the rest of the fertile coast of Fife. Come through the rich Carse of Falkirk to pass the night. Falkirk nothing remarkable, except the grave of Sir John the Grahame, over which, in the succession of time,

four stones have been placed. Pass Dunipace—a place laid out with fine taste—a charming amphitheatre, bounded by a fine village. The Carron, running down the bosom of the whole, makes it one of the most charming little prospects I have seen. Come on to Bannockburn; shown the old house where James III. finished so tragically his unfortunate life; the field of Bannockburn, the hole where glorious Bruce set his standard. Here no Scot can pass uninterested."

I prefer the account briefly rendered in one of his letters to all the rapture of his journal.—"Stirling, August 26—This morning I knelt at the tomb of Sir John the Grahame, the gallant friend of the immortal Wallace, and two hours ago I said a fervent prayer, for old Caledonia, over the hole in a blue whinstone, where Robert the Bruce fixed his royal standard on the banks of Bannockburn; and just now, from Stirling Castle, I have seen, by the setting sun, the glorious prospect of the windings of Forth through the rich Carse of Stirling, and skirting the equally rich Carse of Falkirk." The ancient glory of his country, and the deeds of her heroes, were ever present to his mind.

In his way to Crieff, Burns saw the Ochell-hills, the Devon, the Teith, and the Allan; he rode up the romantic Earn; visited Strathallan, "a fine country, but little improved;" Auchtertyre, where "grows the aik," as his own inimitable song says, and going up Glen-Almond, he visited the "traditionary grave" of Ossian. Making his way to Taymouth, he gazed long and earnestly on the

spreading vale, the princely towers, and the expanding sea: the torrent at his feet came in for a share of poetic praise:

> "The sweeping theatre of hanging woods;
> The incessant roar of headlong-tumbling floods.'

He passed through Dunkeld, visited the Lyon river, and knelt and said prayers in the Druid's temple, a smaller Stonehenge: of this piece of antiquity, he says, "Three circles of stones—the outermost sunk—the second has thirteen stones remaining—the innermost has eight—two large detached ones, like a gate to the south-east." Of Aberfeldy he briefly writes—"described in rhyme." He composed "The Birks of Aberfeldy" as he stood by the falls; the scene is truly beautiful, and the song rivals in truth and effect the landscape. From thence he proceeded to Birnam top: looked down the Tay, and visited a Hermitage on the Bran-water, dedicated to the genius of Ossian.—"Breakfast with Dr. Stewart; Neil Gow plays—a short, stout-built honest highland figure, with his grayish hair shed on his honest social brow; an interesting face, marking strong sense; kind open-heartedness, mixed with unmistrusting simplicity; visit his house—Margaret Gow." He next passed up the Tummel to Blair; glanced at the beautiful and romantic Fascally; the wild grandeur of the Pass of Killiecrankie. In remembrance of this in one of his after songs, he makes a soldier of Mackay's say—

> "The bauld Pitcur fell in a fur,
> And Clavers got a clankie,
> Else I'd hae fed an Athole gled
> On the braes of Killiecrankie.

From the battle field, Burns proceeded to the palace of the Duke of Athol, at Blair, where he was welcomed with much kindness and courtesy :—" Sup with the duchess ; easy and happy from the manners of the family ; confirmed in my good opinion of my friend Walker." Such is his brief record of this event; Professor Walker merited the eulogium, and more ; no sooner did he observe Nicol, than, knowing the manners of the man, he prepared an entertainment according to the nature of the fierce pedagogue. A fishing-rod and a servant to attend him by day, and choice wine and a snug table at night, charmed Nicol and left Burns leisure to converse with the Duke and Duchess, and visit the scenes around which he declared were fine by nature, but hurt by bad taste. Of the visit and visitor, the Professor has given us the following account :—

" Burns seemed at once to perceive and appreciate what was due to the company and to himself, and never to forget a proper respect for the separate species of dignity belonging to each. He did not arrogate conversation, but when led into it he spoke with ease, propriety, and manliness. He tried to exert his abilities, because he knew it was ability alone gave him a title to be there. The Duchess's fine young family attracted much of his admiration ; he drank their healths as "honest men and bonnie lassies," an idea which was much applauded by the company, and with which he has very felicitously closed to his poem." The Poet walked out with the Professor to view the grounds and the scenery. " When we reached," says Walker, " a rustic hut on the river

Tilt, where it is overhung by a woody precipice, from which there is a noble waterfall, he threw himself on the heathy seat, and gave himself up to a tender, abstracted, and voluptuous enthusiasm of imagination. It was with much difficulty I prevailed on him to quit this spot, and to be introduced in proper time for supper."

It was the wish of the Duke that Burns should visit the banks of the Bruar, where the scenery is bold and naked. The Poet, accustomed to the wooded banks of the Ayr and the Doon, was not disposed to admire the barren sublimity of the Bruar, and accordingly wrote a rhyming petition, in which the water requests the umbrage of birch and hazel from the hands of the noble proprietor. This was almost the only wish which the Poet ever uttered that any pains were taken to gratify. The banks of the Bruar are now clothed as he described—the trouts are sheltered from the sun by the overhanging boughs—the songster's nest is to be seen in its season,

"And birks extend their fragrant arms
To screen the dear embrace."

Burns hastened his departure from Blair; two of his biographers express regret at this. Had he remained, they observe, but a few days, he would have met Lord Melville, who had the chief management of the internal affairs of Scotland, and who "might not improbably have been induced to bestow that consideration on the claims of the Poet which, in the absence of any personal acquaintance, Burns' works ought to have received at his hands." Lord Melville admired, with the Poet, woman's beauty, wine's allurements,

and rough intrepidity of conversation: there were no other links to unite them. It was more to the purpose that Burns, at the table of Athole, made the acquaintance of Graham of Fintray, who has the merit of doing the little that was done for him in the way of patronage.

Historic and poetic scenes—spots where battles had been fought and songs sung, were most in request with Burns. On quitting Blair he shaped his course towards the Spey, and followed the stream. The straths he found rich, the mountains wild and magnificent. He saw Rothemurche and the gloomy forests of Glenmore, and passing rapidly through Strathspey, halted an hour at a wild inn, and visited Sir James Grant, whose lady he pronounces in his journal sweet and pleasant. "I passed," said he to his brother Gilbert, "through a wild country among cliffs grey with eternal snows and glens gloomy and savage." He came upon the Findhorn "in mist and darkness," visited Castle-Cawdor, where Macbeth murdered Duncan, saw the bed in which tradition says the king was stabbed; hurried on to Fort-George, and thence to Inverness. He took a hurried look at Loch Ness with its wild braes, and the General's Hut; visited Urquhart Castle, with its fine strath; and was so rapt at the Falls of Fyers that he broke out into verse.

Short as the Poet's stay was in Inverness, he found leisure to admire the classic capital of the eastern Highlands. The ladies, with their snooded hair and simple elegance of dress; the jail, which was pronounced unable to retain a prisoner who belonged

to a clan; the fort, raised during the days of Cromwell to keep the land in awe; and the beautiful Hill of Fairies, near the river side, claimed by tradition as the grave of Thomas the Rhymer, were not looked upon without emotion and remark. On leaving Inverness he passed over Culloden Moor, a place calculated to awaken sad reflections. On that heath, so fatal to the hopes of our ancient line of princes—a heath desolate and blasted, and only relieved in its brown barrenness by the green mounds raised over the bones of the brave—the Poet paused, and was long lost in thought; the fruit of his meditations was a lyric, which cannot easily be equalled for simplicity and pathos:—

"The lovely lass o' Inverness,
Nae joy nor pleasure can she see;
For e'en an' morn she cries, alas!
And ay the saut tear blins her ee.
Drumossie moor, Drumossie day,
A waefu day it was to me;
For there I lost my father dear—
My father dear, and brethren three."

The Poet reached Kilravock in time for breakfast; his record of this halt is short, but to the point:—"Old Mrs. Rose: sterling sense, warm heart, strong feelings, and honest pride, all in an uncommon degree. Mrs. Rose, jun., a little milder than the mother; this, perhaps, owing to her being younger. Mrs. Rose and Mr. Grant accompany us to Kildrummie. Two young ladies: Miss Rose, who sung two Gaelic songs, beautiful and lovely; Miss Sophia Brodie, most agreeable and amiable; both of them gentle, mild, the sweetest creatures on earth—and happiness be with them!" Of this visit the Poet had

long a grateful recollection : " There was something in my reception at Kilravock," he says, in a letter to Mrs. Rose, " so different from the cold, obsequious, dancing-school bow of politeness, that it almost got into my head that friendship had occupied her ground without the intermediate march of acquaintance. I wish I could transcribe, or rather transfuse, into language the glow of my heart. My ready fancy, with colours more mellow than life itself, painted the beautifully wild scenery of Kilravock—the venerable grandeur of the castle—the spreading woods—the winding river, gladly leaving his unsightly heathy source, and lingering with apparent delight as he passed the Fairy-Walk at the foot of the garden—your late distressful anxieties—your present enjoyments—your dear little angel, the pride of your hopes—my aged friend, venerable in worth and years, whose loyalty and other virtues will strongly entitle her to the support of the Almighty spirit here, and his peculiar favour in a happier state of existence. You cannot imagine, madam, how much such feelings delight me; they are the dearest proofs of my own immortality."

Burns, it would appear by a letter from Mrs. Rose, had been hurried from her fireside by the importunities of Nicol; the two friends continued their journey in a colder mood. The diary was now sadly neglected; it affords, however, sundry touches of character :—"Dine at Nairn ; fall in with a pleasant enough gentleman—Dr. Stewart, who had been abroad with his father in the 'Forty-Five ;' and Mr. Falconer, a spare, irascible, warm-hearted Norlan and

a non-juror." He passed by Kinloss, where Edward the First halted in his conquering march, intimidated as much by wild woods and savage hills as by the warlike people. He admired in Elgin the remains of Scotland's noblest cathedral, and examined at Forres the enormous slab of grey stone, in shape resembling a sword-blade, erected as a monument of peace between Sweno of Denmark, and Malcolm II. Something like sculptures on the sides, antiquarians aver, intimate a drawn battle and a treaty of peace.—"Mr. Brodie tells me," says the Poet, "that the moor where Shakspeare lays Macbeth's witch-meeting is still haunted, and that the country folk won't pass it by night."

On reaching Fochabers, the Poet left his companion at an inn, and went to pay his respects to the Duke and Duchess of Gordon, to whose splendid mansion the village is as a suburb.—"He was received," says Currie, "with the utmost hospitality and kindness; and the family being about to sit down to dinner, he was invited to take his place at table as a matter of course. This invitation he accepted, and after drinking a few glasses of wine he rose up, and proposed to withdraw. On being pressed to stay he mentioned, for the first time, his engagement with his fellow-traveller; and, his noble host offering to send a servant to conduct Mr. Nicol to the castle, Burns insisted on undertaking that office himself: he was, however, accompanied by a gentleman, a particular acquaintance of the Duke, by whom the invitation was delivered in all the forms of politeness." They found Nicol in a foaming

passion: in vain the Poet soothed, explained, expostulated: he refused all apology, and kept striding up and down the streets of Fochabers, cursing the postillions for not yoking the horses and hurrying him away. Burns, it is said, eyed the irascible pedagogue for a moment, as if deciding whether he should confront him with fury equal to his own, or quietly seat himself in his own nook of the chaise, and proceed southward. He chose the latter alternative, and turned his back on Castle-Gordon with a vexation he sought not to conceal. The rough temper of his companion did not, however, prevent him from soliciting the muse for a song in honour of The Gordon; but the muse seems to have been infected with the mood of Nicol; she spoke, but not happily. All he says in his journal is, "Cross Spey to Fochabers; fine palace, worthy of the generous proprietor. The Duke makes me happier than ever man did—noble, princely, yet mild, condescending and affable; gay and kind: the Duchess, witty and sensible—God bless them!"

The visit of Burns to Castle-Gordon was not altogether one of curiosity or chance. The Duchess desired to befriend the Poet; she spoke of his merits in the north, and praised his poems in the south, in coteries where their language was dark and mystical. Her friend, Henry Addington, now Viscount Sidmouth, saw in the verses of the rustic bard a spontaneous vigour of expression, and a glowing richness of language all but rivalling Shakspeare. He talked of them among the titled and enthusiastic, and took pleasure in quoting them to

Pitt and to Melville. This was not unknown to the Duchess: she invited him to Castle-Gordon, and promised him the company of Burns and Beattie. The future premier was unable to accept the invitation; but wrote and forwarded, it is said, these memorable lines—memorable as the first indication of that deep love which England now entertains for the genius of Burns:—

"Yes! pride of Scotia's favoured plains, 'tis thine
The warmest feelings of the heart to move,
To bid it throb with sympathy divine,
To glow with friendship, or to melt with love.

'What though each morning sees thee rise to toil;
Tho' Plenty on thy cot no blessing showers,
Yet Independence cheers thee with her smile,
And Fancy strews thy moorland with her flowers.

"And dost thou blame the impartial will of Heaven,
Untaught of life the good and ill to scan?
To thee the Muse's choicest wreath is given,
To thee the genuine dignity of man
Then to the want of worldly gear resign'd,
Be grateful for the wealth of thy exhaustless mind."

Aberdeen the Poet calls a lazy town, contrary to the general opinion of Scotland. Here he met with Bishop Skinner, son of the author of Tullochgorum, —"A man," he says, "whose venerable manner is the most marked of any in so young a man. Near Stonehive, the coast a good deal romantic—meet my relations. Robert Burns, writer in Stonehive, one of those who love fun, a gill, and a joke; his wife, sweet and hospitable, without any affectation." He now directed his steps to Muthie, and visited the caverns on its wild romantic coast; he stopped for an hour to examine Arbroath Abbey; passed through Dundee—"a low-lying but pleasant town,"—and having examined Broughty Castle on the banks of

the Tay, he went "through," says his journal, "the rich harvests and fine hedge-rows of the Carse of Gowrie; along the romantic margin of the Grampian Hills to the fruitful, woody, hilly country which encloses Perth." In going up Strathern he visited the banks of Endermay, famous in song; then mused awhile on the scene made memorable by the affecting story of Bessy Bell and Mary Gray; and, finally, hurried to Queensferry, "through a cold, barren country." He parted with the north in a better mood in his last than in his first journey; he had been every where, save at Arbruchil, kindly received; chief had vied with chief in doing him honour, and though he took but some twenty and odd days to this extensive tour, he had seen, observed, and imbibed so much of the mountain spirit as coloured many of his future lyrics. He took farewell of the north in character. On passing the Lowland line he turned about and exclaimed:—

"When death's dark stream I ferry o'er,
A day that surely shall come,
In Heaven itself I'll ask no more
Than just a Highland welcome."

Having looked leisurely over the farms which still awaited his offer on Dalswinton estate, and remained a week or two with his mother at Mauchline, Burns proceeded to Edinburgh for the purpose of arranging his affairs with Creech: a sharp and yet dilatory person. He entertained a hope, too, that some of the leading men of Scotland would find him a task less alien to his feelings than farming, which

in those days yielded but a bare subsistence; and as he had been acceptable to them before, he expected to be no less so now, when the world had sanctioned their praise. His bookseller had distant correspondents to consult, and the proceeds of a large edition to calculate; and this was the work of time. The patronage, too, which the Poet anticipated, required leisure; the great must not be pressed with eager solicitude by the poor and the dependent; their deeds of generosity must be allowed to come in their own time and season, and seem the offspring of their own natures.

The active spirit of Burns could not be idle: he addressed himself to the two-fold business of love and verse. I have related the success of his poetic homage to Charlotte Hamilton; she had passed from his memory, when, on December 30, 1787, he thus wrote to his friend Richard Brown, mariner:—"I am just the same will-o'-wisp being I used to be; about the first and fourth quarters of the moon, I generally set in for the trade-wind of wisdom; but about the full and the change I am the luckless victim of mad tornadoes which blow me into chaos. Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom, and I am at this moment ready to hang myself for a young Edinburgh widow. My highland dirk, that used to hang beside my crutches, I have gravely removed into a neighbouring closet, the key of which I cannot command in case of spring-tide paroxysms. You may guess of her wit by the verses which she sent me the other day:—

"Talk not of love; it gives me pain:
For love has been my foe;
He bound me with an iron chain,
And plunged me deep in woe."

This Edinburgh beauty was the Mrs. Mac. of the Poet's toasts when the wine circulated—the accomplished Clarinda, to whom, under the name of Sylvander, he addressed so much prose and verse. This "mistress of the Poet's soul and queen of poetesses," could not be otherwise than tolerant in her taste if she sympathized in the affected strains which he offered at the altar of her beauty. His prose is cumbrous and his verse laboured: there are, it is true, passages of natural feeling and sentiments sometimes of a high order, but in general his raptures are artificial and his sensibility assumed. He puts himself into strange postures and picturesque positions, and feels imaginary pains to correspond; he wounds himself to show how readily the sores of love can be mended, and flogs his body like a devotee to obtain the compassion of his patron saint. Nor is this all; in his addresses he is often audaciously bold; he wants tenderness, too, and sometimes taste:—

"In vain would Prudence, with her decent sneer,
Point to a censuring world, and bid me fear.
Above that world on wings of love I rise,
I know its worst, and can that worst despise.
Wrong'd, slander'd, shunned, unpitied, unredrest,
The mock'd quotation of the scorner's jest,
Let Prudence' direst bodements on me fall—
Clarinda, rich reward! o'erpays them all."

These lines are sufficiently forward, and could not but be painful to the lady unless she smiled on them as the fantastic effusions of a pastoral platonism. In another part of the same poem he vows,

"By all on high adoring mortals know,
By all the conscious villain fears below,"

to love her while wood grows and water runs, according to the tenure of entailed property.

It is some apology for the Poet, perhaps, that these compositions, which I am unwilling to regard as serious, were produced in the painful leisure which a bruised limb afforded him; the lady to whom they were addressed, was now and then a visitor to the crippled Bard, and diverted him with her wit and soothed him with her presence. It is true that the poem from which these lines are extracted contains couplets presumptuous and familiar, and asserts that they were commended by his fair correspondent; but this cannot well be believed by those who draw conclusions from the general spirit of the letters. Those who know Clarinda cannot but feel that Burns thought of her when he said, "People of nice sensibility and generous minds have a certain intrinsic dignity which fires at being trifled with or lowered, or even too closely approached." Yet watched as he was by beauty on his couch, and praised as a poet from "Maidenkirk to John o' Groats," the Poet was any thing but happy. "I have a hundred times wished," he says in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, "that one could resign life as an officer resigns his commission; for I would not take in any poor ignorant wretch by selling out. Lately I was a sixpenny private, and, God knows, a miserable soldier enough; now I march to the campaign a starving cadet, a little more conspicuously wretched."

During the abode of Burns in Edinburgh, John-

son commenced his "Musical Museum," the object of which was to unite the songs and the music of Scotland in one general collection. The proprietor, a man of more enthusiasm than knowledge, inserted in his first volume, published in June, 1787, several airs of at least doubtful origin, and several songs of more than doubtful merit: before he commenced the second volume, he had acquired the help of Burns; indeed, the first bears marks of his hand. "Green grow the Rashes" is an acknowledged production, and "Bonnie Dundee" carries the peculiar impress of his genius:—

"My blessings upon that sweet wee lippie;
My blessings upon thy bonnie e'e bree;
Thy smiles are sae like my blythe soger laddie,
Thou's ay be dearer and dearer to me."

To the second volume, published in February, 1788, Burns contributed the preface, and no less than thirty lyrics. In the former he says, "The songs contained in this volume, both music and poetry, are all of them the work of Scotsmen. Wherever the old words could be recovered, they have been preferred; both as generally suiting better the genius of the tunes, and to preserve the productions of those earlier sons of the Scottish muses. Ignorance and prejudice may, perhaps, affect to sneer at the simplicity of the poetry or music of some of these pieces; but their having been for ages the favourites of nature's judges, the common people, was to the editor a sufficient test of their merit."

Most of the songs which Burns contributed are of great merit. "To the Weavers gin ye go" is

the homely song of a country lass who went to warp a web, and forgot her errand; for—

"A bonnie westlin weaver lad
Sat working at his loom,
He took my heart as wi' a net
In every knot and thrum."

It relates, I have heard, the story of one of his rustic sweethearts. "Whistle an' I'll come to you, my lad" is an imperfect version of one of his happiest songs. The idea is old—and some of the words. The verse which he added will ever be new:—

"Come down the back stairs when ye come to court me;
Come down the back stairs when ye come to court me;
Come down the back stairs, and let naebody see,
And come as ye were na coming to me."

He loved to eke out the old melodies of Caledonia. "I'm o'er young to marry yet" is sung by a very young lady, who upbraids her suitor with a design to carry her from her mother, and put her into the company of a strange man during the lonely nights of winter. She, however, discovers a remedy:—

"Fu' loud and shrill the frosty wind
Blaws through the leafless timmer, sir;
But if ye'll come this gate again,
I'll aulder be gin simmer, sir."

"The Birks of Aberfeldy" originated in an old strain called the Birks of Abergeldie, but surpasses it as far as sunshine excels candlelight. The same may be said of "Macpherson's Farewell." Something of the rudiments of, this bold rant may be found in old verses of the same name; but they are, in comparison, as barley-chaff is to gold-sand. The hero of the song, a musician and noted freebooter, was taken red-hand, and hurried to execution.

When the rope was round his neck, he sent for his favourite fiddle, played the air called, after him, Macpherson's Rant, offered the instrument in vain to any one who could play the tune, then broke it over the hangman's head, and flung himself from the ladder. His song is in character, wild, daring, and revengeful :—

"O what is death but parting breath?
"On many a bloody plain
I've dared his face, and in this place
I scorn him yet again.
Untie these bands from off my hands,
And bring to me my sword,
And there's no a man in all Scotland,
But I'll brave him at a word."

The genius of the north had an influence over the Poet's musings in other compositions. In "The Highland Lassie," the lover complains of want of wealth, and the faithlessness of fortune, but strong in affection, declares,

"For her I'll dare the billows roar,
For her I'll trace a distant shore,
That Indian wealth may lustre throw
Around my Highland lassie, O."

In "The Northern Lass" he utters similar sentiments; and in "Braw, braw lads of Galla Water," his hand may be traced by the curious in Scottish song; it is too kenspeckle to be denied :—

"Sae fair her hair, sae brent her brow,
Sae bonnie blue her een my dearie,
Sae white her teeth, sae sweet her mou,
The mair I look, she's mair my dearie."

"Stay, my Charmer," if not of highland extraction, owes its air to the north. There are but eight lines; but he excelled in saying much in small compass :—

"By my love so ill requited;
By the faith you fondly plighted,
By the pangs of lover's slighted,
Do not, do not leave me so."

To a jacobite feeling we owe that fine strain "Strathallan's Lament."—"This air," says the Poet, "is the composition of one of the worthiest and best men living, Allan Masterton. As he and I were both sprouts of jacobitism, we agreed to dedicate the words and air to that cause." The song is supposed to be the "Goodnight" of James Drummond, Viscount of Strathallan, who escaped to France from Culloden. Even in the days of Burns, the language which the exile is made to utter, could not but be unacceptable to many :—

"In the cause of right engaged,
Wrongs injurious to redress,
Honour's war we strongly waged,
But the heavens denied success."

The amended songs are numerous. In his hastiest touches there is something always which no hand but that of Burns could communicate. "How long and dreary is the night!" is mostly his; the last verse will go to many hearts :—

"How slow ye move, ye heavy hours,
As ye were wae and wearie!
It was na sae ye glinted by,
When I was wi' my dearie."

The hoary wooer in "To daunton me," is sketched with all the scornful spirit of a lady who has set her heart on a younger person :—

"He hirples twa-fauld as he dow,
Wi' his toothless gab and his auld bald pow,
And the rain dreeps down frae his red bleered ee,
That auld man shall never daunton me."

In "Bonnie Peggie Alison," the Poet indulges in such license of language as may startle the fastidious; yet it is but the rapture of an enthusiastic heart:—

"When in my arms wi' a' thy charms,
I clasp my countless treasure,
I seek nae mair o' heaven to share
Than sic a moment's pleasure."

"The Dusty Miller" exhibits a few of his happy emendations, A young woman, in remembering the attractions of a lover who wins a shilling before he spends a groat, sings with arch simplicity—

"Dusty was the coat,
Dusty was the colour,
Dusty was the kiss
I got frae the miller."

He withheld his name from "Theniel Menzies' bonny Mary." The buoyancy of the language, and the natural truth of the delineation must be felt by all who know what lyric composition is:—

"Her een sae bright, her brow sae white,
Her haffet locks as brown's a berry,
And aye they dimpled wi' a smile,
The rosy cheeks o' bonny Mary."

"The Banks of the Devon," "Raving winds around her blowing," "Musing on the roaring ocean," "A Rose-bud by my early walk," and "Where braving angry Winter's storms," were all published in the Poet's name. In the first, he paid homage to the charms of Charlotte Hamilton; and in the latter, to the gentle and winning graces of Margaret Chalmers. These are more finished and casual, yet scarcely so happy as some of the hasty and perhaps inconsiderate snatches with which he eked out the fragmentary strains of the old minstrels.

That his heart was much with this sort of work, we may gather from his letter to Mrs. Rose of Kilravock, 17th Feb. 1788 :—"I am assisting a friend in a collection of Scottish songs set to their proper tunes. Every air worth preserving is to be included. Among others, I have given "Morag," and some few Highland airs which pleased me most, a dress which will be more generally known, though far—far inferior in real merit." He wrote to friends—east, west, north, and south, for airs and verses for the Museum. From his old comrade M'Candlish he begged "Pompey's Ghost"—from Skinner of Linshart: from Dr. Blacklock he entreated communications, and he drew upon his own memory, for some of those antique strains picked up from the singing of his mother or the maidens of Ayshire.

To those who charge Burns with idleness or dissipation during this winter in Edinburgh, many will think thirty songs an answer sufficient, without taking into consideration his maimed limb, and his numerous letters to Clarinda. He had other matters, too, on his mind; I have said that he exhibited early symptoms of jacobitism; his Highland tours and conversations with the chiefs and ladies of the north, strengthened a liking which he seems to have inherited from his fathers. On the 31st day of December, 1787, he was present at a meeting to celebrate the birth-day of the last of the race of our native princes, the unfortunate Charles Edward: he acted the part of laureate on the occasion, and recited an ode, lamenting the past, sympathizing in the present, and prophesying retribution for the future.

almost all the verse for which Burns taxed his spirit, the ode is cumbrous and inflated; neither the fiery impetuosity of Grahame, nor the calm intrepidity of Balmerino inspired him—

"Ye honoured mighty dead!
Who nobly perished in the glorious cause,
Your king, your country, and your laws;
From great Dundee, who, smiling, victory led,
And fell a martyr in her arms;
What breast of northern ice but warms
To bold Balmerino's undying name?
Whose soul of fire, lighted at Heaven's high flame,
Deserves the proudest wreath departed heroes claim!"

Who were the Poet's associates at this anniversary no one has told us. The white rose of jacobitism was worn in those days by many people of rank and condition: it was the cognizance of all who regretted that Scotland had ceased to be a separate kingdom, had lost the dignity of her parliament, the honours of her monarchy, and was compelled to send her children into another land to represent her interests, where they were exposed to the scoffs and insults of a proud and haughty people. This was the jacobitism of Burns; though he sung of the woes of Drumossie, and the sufferings of Prince Charles, he had no desire to see the ancient line restored, and the Hanoverian dynasty expelled, since he knew that every step towards the throne would be on a dead man's body. His heart clung to the immediate descendants of Bruce, and it is probable that he never studied the mystery of a constitution, which, to secure our freedom, raised princes to the throne, who could neither speak our language, nor comprehend the genius of the people. His whole affections were concentrated on his native

land; his whole object was to do it honour; for this he sacrificed his time; to this he dedicated his genius; and on this, though poor, he laid out some of the little wealth he had. He saw with sorrow that the dust of Fergusson, the Poet, lay among the ignoble dead, and desired to raise a memorial, such as might guide the steps of the lovers of Scottish song to the grave of his brother Bard. This humble wish was graciously granted by the authorities of the Canongate kirk, and he raised a monumental stone, which is still to be seen among the thick-piled gravestones of the burial-ground.

That Burns could write so many songs is to be marvelled at, when we reflect that, during most of the time, a sort of civil war existed between him and his bookseller, of which many symptoms are visible in his printed and manuscript correspondence.—"I have broke measures," he says, "with Creech, and last week I wrote him a frosty keen letter. He replied in terms of chastisement, and promised me, upon his honour, that I should have the account on Monday; but this is Tuesday, and yet I have not heard a word from him. God have mercy on me! a poor, damned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool! The sport, the miserable victim of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and bedlam passions—

'I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to die.'

I have this moment got a hint. I fear I am something like undone; but I hope for the best. Come, stubborn pride and unshrinking resolution! accom-

pany me through this, to me, miserable world. You must not desert me! Your friendship I think I can count on, though I should date my letters from a marching regiment. Early in life, and all my life, I reckoned on a recruiting drum as my forlorn hope. Seriously though, life at present presents me with but a melancholy path; but my limb will soon be sound, and I shall struggle on."

These expressions refer to whispers which had reached his ear about the solvency of Creech, and are contained in a letter to Margaret Chalmers: the conduct of his bookseller dwelt long on his mind; we find him, on the 4th of January, 1789, thus writing to Dr. Moore.—"I cannot boast about Creech's ingenuous dealing; he kept me hanging on about Edinburgh from the 7th of August until the 13th of April, 1788, before he would condescend to give me a statement of affairs; nor had I got it even then, but for an angry letter I wrote him which irritated his pride. I could not a 'tale' but a detail 'unfold;' but what am I that I should speak against the Lord's anointed bailie of Edinburgh! I give you this information, but I give it to yourself only, for I am still much in the gentleman's mercy. Perhaps I injure the man in the idea I am sometimes tempted to have of him. God forbid I should! A little time will try, for in a month I shall go to town to wind up the business if possible." That Creech, after long evasion, behaved honourably and liberally to the impatient Poet, is well enough known to the world: I record these complaints to vindicate the latter from the

charge of having loitered needlessly in Edinburgh, and refrained from putting the ploughshare in the ground, which was offered for his acceptance.

Burns now set seriously about considering his future prospects. Having settled with Creech, he wrote to Mr. Millar that he would accept his offer with regard to the farm; he lent two hundred pounds to his brother Gilbert, to enable him to mend himself in the world and support his mother, whom he tenderly loved; and he resolved to unite himself to Jean Armour, carry her to the banks of the Nith, and follow the plough and the muses. What he had seen and endured in Edinburgh during his second visit, admonished him regarding the reed on which he leant, when he hoped for a place of profit and honour from the aristocracy on account of his genius. On his first appearance the doors of the nobility opened spontaneous, "on golden hinges turning," and he ate spiced meats and drank rare wines, interchanging nods and smiles with "high dukes and mighty earls." A colder reception awaited his second coming; the doors of lords and ladies opened with a tardy courtesy; he was received with a cold and measured stateliness, was seldom requested to stop, seldomer to repeat his visit; and one of his companions used to relate with what indignant feeling the Poet recounted his fruitless calls and his uncordial receptions in the good town of Edinburgh. That he had high hopes is well known; there were not wanting friends to whisper that lordly, nay, royal patronage was certain; nor were such expectations at all unreasonable—but genius is not the passport to patron-

age; he was allied to no noble family, and could not come forward under the shelter of a golden wing; he was unconnected with any party which could pretend to political influence, and who had power either to retard or forward a ministerial measure; moreover, he was one of those "whim-inspired" persons of whom his inimitable "Bard's Epitaph" sings:—

"Owre fast for thought, owre hot for rule,
Owre blate to seek, owre proud to snool."

His case was, therefore, next to hopeless; he asked for nothing, and nothing was offered, though men of rank and power were aware that he was unfitted with an aim in life—that poetry alone could not sustain him, and that he must go back to the flail and the furrow. He went to Edinburgh, strong in the belief that genius such as his would raise him in society; but he came not back without a sourness of spirit and a bitterness of feeling.

The pride of Burns, which was great, would not allow him to complain, and his ambition, which was still greater, hindered him from regarding his condition as yet hopeless. When he complained at all, he did not make his moan to man; his letters to his companions or his friends are sometimes stern, fierce, and full of defiance; he uttered his lament in the ear of woman, and seemed to be soothed with her attention and her sympathy.—"When I must escape into a corner," he says bitterly to Mrs. Dunlop, "lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim, what merits has he had, or

what demerit have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world the sport of folly or the victim of pride? I have read somewhere of a monarch who was so out of humour with the Ptolomean system of astronomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech; but often, as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Prince's-street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed himself out as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a perspective. This would enable us at once to adjust the ceremonials in making a bow or making way to a great man, and that, too, within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature himself requires." The condition of the Poet made, we fear, such bitter reflections matters of frequent recurrence. The learned authors—and Edinburgh swarmed with them—claimed rank above the inspired clod of the valley; the gentry asserted such superiorty as their natural inheritance; the nobility held their elevation by act of parliament or the grace of majesty; and none of them were prepared to accept the brotherhood of one who held the patent of his honours immediately from nature.

In the course of the winter Burns resolved, since no better might be, to unite the farmer with the poet; some one persuaded him that to both he could join the gauger. So soon as this possessed his fancy, he determined to beg the humble boon from his patrons, and as no one seemed more likely to be kind than the Earl of Glencairn, he addressed him anxiously:—"I have weighed—long and seriously weighed—my situation. I wish to get into the excise: I am told your lordship's interest will easily procure me the grant from the commissioners; and your lordship's patronage and goodness, which have already rescued me from obscurity, wretchedness, and exile, embolden me to ask that interest. You have likewise put it in my power to save the little tie of home that sheltered an aged mother, two brothers, and three sisters from destruction. I am ill qualified to dog the heels of greatness with the impertinence of solicitation, and tremble nearly as much at the thought of the cold promise as the cold denial." What the Earl did in this matter is unknown; his conduct seems to have satisfied Burns, for at his death, which soon followed, he poured out a poetic lament full of the most touching sensibility.

The Excise commission came in an unlooked for way. While Burns was laid up with his crushed limb, he was attended by Alexander Wood, surgeon, a gentleman still affectionately remembered as "kind old Sandy Wood:" to him the Poet had mentioned his desire to obtain a situation in the Excise. Wood went to work, and so bestirred himself, that Grahame of Fintray put his name on the roll of excise-

men at once. The Poet, who, like the hero of his own inimitable song, was

"Contented wi' little, and cantie wi' mair,"

communicated this stroke of what he called good fortune to Margaret Chalmers in these words:—"I have entered into the Excise. I go to the west for about three weeks and then return to Edinburgh for six weeks' instructions. I have chosen this, my dear friend, after mature deliberation. The question is not at what door of fortune's palace shall we enter in, but what doors does she open for us. I was not likely to get any thing to do. I got this without any hanging-on or mortifying solicitation; it is immediate bread, and though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life."

Nor did he withhold the tidings of his appointment from Mrs. Dunlop:—"I thought thirty-five pounds a year no bad *dernier resort* for a poor poet, if Fortune, in her jade tricks, should kick him down from the little eminence to which she has lately helped him up." Gauger is a word of mean sound, nor is the calling a popular one; yet the situation is neither so humble, nor the emoluments so trifling, as some of the Poet's southern admirers have supposed. A guager's income in those days, on the banks of Nith, was equal to three hundred a year at present in London; an excise officer is the companion of gentlemen; he is usually a well-informed person, and altogether fifty per cent. above the ordinary excise officers on the banks of the Thames. It is true, that Burns sometimes speaks with levity of his situation, but that is

no proof of his contempt for it; he loved in verse to hover between jest and earnest; and if he thought peevishly about it at all, it was in comparison of a place such as his genius merited. Having secured the excise appointment, and, on the 13th of March, 1788, bargained with Mr. Miller of Dalswinton for the farm of Ellisland, in Nithsdale, he resolved to bid Edinburgh farewell.

The Poet, it is said, visited the graves of Ramsay and Fergusson, then took leave of some friends by letter, and waited upon others: among the latter were Blair, Stewart, Tytler, Mackenzie, and Blacklock. I have heard that his reception was not so cordial as formerly; it would seem that his free way of speaking and free way of living, had touched them somewhat. That Burns wrote joyous letters, uttered unguarded speeches when the wine-cup went round, and was now and then to be found in the company of writers' clerks, country lairds, and west country farmers, is very true, and could not well be otherwise. He was educated in a less courtly school than professors and divines: mechanics and farmers had been his associates from his cradle. The language of a farmer's fire-side is less polished and more natural than that of the college; he spoke the language of a different class of people, and he kept their company because he was one of them. Genius had ranked him with the highest; but it was the pleasure of fortune or his country to keep him at the plough. The man who got his education in the furrowed field—whose eloquence sprung from the barn and the forge,

"When ploughmen gather with their graith,"

and who wrote not classic verse, but "hamely western jingle," could not by any possibility please, by his conversation or his way of life, the polished, the polite, and the fastidious. That Burns appeared fierce and rude in their eyes, is as true as that they seemed to him "sweet curd of asses milk,"—learnedly dull and hypocritically courteous.

It was not unknown to the literati and the lords of Edinburgh, that Burns kept a memorandum-book, in which he not only noted down his Border and his Highland tours, but introduced full-length portraits of all the eminent persons whom he chanced to meet or with whom he associated.—"I will sketch," said he, "every character that any way strikes me, to the best of my power, with unshrinking justice. I will insert anecdotes and take down remarks in the old law-phrase, without feud or favour. My own private story likewise, my love adventures, my rambles; the frowns and smiles of fortune on my bardship; my poems and fragments, that must never see the light, shall be occasionally inserted." He kept this formidable book so little of a secret, that he allowed a visitor sometimes to take a look at his gallery of portraits, and as he distributed light and shade with equal freedom and force, it was soon bruited abroad that Burns had drawn stern likenesses of his chief friends and benefactors. This book is not now to be found; it was carried away from the Poet's lodgings by one his visitors, who refused to restore it—enlisted in the artillery—sailed for Gibraltar, and died about the year 1800. From what remains, the following characters are extracted; They make us regret the loss of the rest:—

"With Dr. Blair I am much at my ease; I never respect him with humble veneration; but when he kindly interests himself in my welfare—or, still more, when he descends from his pinnacle and meets me on equal ground in conversation, my heart overflows with what is called liking. When he neglects me for the mere carcase of greatness, or when his eye measures the difference of our points of elevation, I say to myself, with scarcely any emotion, what do I care for him or his pomp either? It is not easy forming an exact judgment of any one, but in my opinion, Dr. Blair is merely an astonishing proof what industry and application can do. Natural parts, like his, are frequently to be met with: his vanity is proverbially known among his acquaintance, but he is justly at the head of what may be called fine writing; and a critic of the first, the very first rank in prose; even in poetry, a bard of nature's making can alone take the pass of him. He has a heart not of the very finest water, but far from being an ordinary one."

Other characters were sketched with still greater freedom. Here is his satiric portrait of a celebrated lawyer:—

"He clench'd his pamphlets in his fist,
He quoted an' he hinted,
Till in a declamation-mist
His argument he tint it;
He graped fort, he gaped fort,
He found it was awa, man,
And when his common-sense came short,
He eked it out wi' law, man."

The literati of Edinburgh were not displeased, it is likely, when he went away: nor were the titled part of the community without their share in this

silent rejoicing; his presence was a reproach to them. "The illustrious of his native land, from whom he looked for patronage," had proved that they had the carcase of greatness, but wanted the soul: they subscribed for his poems, and looked on their generosity as "an alms could keep a god alive." He turned his back on Edinburgh, and from that time forward scarcely counted that man his friend, who spoke of titled persons in his presence. Whilst sailing on pleasure's sea in a gilded barge, with perfumed and lordly company, he was, in the midst of his enjoyment, thrown roughly overboard, and had to swim to a barren shore, or sink for ever.

Burns now turned his steps westward. In one of his desponding moods he had lately said to a correspondent, "There are just two creatures that I would envy—a horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe; the one has not a wish without enjoyment, the other has neither wish nor fear." In the same mingled spirit of despair and pleasure he complains—"I lie so miserably open to the inroads and incursions of a mischievous, light-armed, well-mounted banditti, under the banners of imagination, whim, caprice and passion; and the heavy-armed veteran regulars of wisdom, prudence, and forethought, move so very, very slow, that I am almost in a state of perpetual warfare, and, alas! frequent defeat." The thoughts of home, of a settled purpose in life, gave him a silent gladness of heart, such as he had never before known; and, to use his own words, he moved

homeward with as much hilarity in his gait and countenance "as a May-frog, leaping across the newly harrowed ridge, enjoying the fragrance of the refreshed earth after the long-expected shower." He reached Mauchline towards the close of April: he was not a moment too soon; the intercourse which, in his visits to Ayrshire, he had renewed with Jean Armour, exposed her once more to the reproaches of her family;—she might say, in the affecting words of one whose company had brought both joy and woe—

"My father put me frae his door,
My friends they hae disown'd me a';
But I hae ane will take my part—
The bonnie lad that's far awa."

On his arrival he took her by the hand, and was remarried according to the simple and effectual form of the laws of Scotland:—"Daddie Auld," and his friends of the Old-light, felt every wish to be moderate with one whose powers of derision had been already proved. He next introduced Mrs. Burns to his friends, both in person and by letter. Much of his correspondence of this period bears evidence of the peace of mind and gladness of heart which this two-fold act of love and generosity had brought to him.

To Mrs. Dunlop, he says, "I found a once much-loved, and still much-loved female, literally and truly cast out to the mercy of the naked elements; there is no sporting with a fellow-creature's happiness or misery. The most placid good-nature and sweetness of disposition; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with all its powers to love me; vigorous

health, and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best advantage by a more than commonly handsome figure; these, I think, in a woman, may make a good wife, though she should never have read a page but the scriptures, nor have danced in a brighter assembly than a penny-pay wedding. To jealousy or infidelity I am an equal stranger: my preservative from the first is the most thorough consciousness of her sentiments of honour and her attachment to me; my antidote against the last is my long and deep-rooted affection for her. In housewife matters, of aptness to learn and activity to execute she is eminently mistress; and, during my absence, she is regularly and constantly apprentice to my mother and sisters in their dairy, and other rural business. The Muses must not be offended when I tell them the concerns of my wife and family will in my mind always take the pass; but, I assure them, their ladyships will ever come next in place. You are right that a bachelor state would have insured me more friends; but, from a cause you will easily guess, conscious peace in the enjoyment of my own mind, and unmistrusting confidence in approaching my God, would seldom have been of the number."

On the same interesting topic he writes to Margaret Chalmers:—"I have married my Jean. I had a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my determination, and I durst not trifle with so important a deposit, nor have I any cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tittle-tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of

boarding-school affectation; and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and kindest heart in the country. A certain late publication of Scots poems she has perused very devoutly, and all the ballads in the country, as she has the finest wood-note wild I ever heard. I am the more particular in this lady's character, as I know she will henceforth have a share in your best wishes."

These letters, and others in the same strain, have misled Walker into the belief that Burns married Jean Armour from a sentiment of duty rather than a feeling of love; no belief can be more imaginary. The unfortunate story of his affection had been told to the world both in prose and verse; he was looked upon as one deserted by the object of his regard, under circumstances alike extraordinary and painful. That he forgave her for the sad requital of his love, and her relations for their severity, and sought her hand and their alliance, required something like apology to his friends. I see nothing in these letters out of harmony with affection and love.—"That he originally loved his Jean," says the Professor, "is not to be doubted; but, on considering all the circumstances of the case, it may be presumed that, when he first proposed marriage, it was partly from a desire to repair the injury of her reputation, and that his distress, on her refusal, proceeded as much from wounded pride as from disappointed love." The best answer to this is afforded by the words of the Poet. He loved her, he never had ceased to love her; he considered her sacrifice of him as made

to the pious feelings and authority of her father :—"I can have no nearer idea," he says, "of the place of eternal punishment, than what I have felt in my own breast on her account. Never man loved, or rather adored, a woman more than I did her, and I do still love her to distraction after all." If this is not the language of ardent love, I know not what it means.

But the Professor seems desirous of proving that this change in the Poet's affections was the necessary result of being exposed to the allurements of the high-bred dames of Edinburgh.—"The three years that succeeded," he observes, "had opened to him a new scene: and the female society to which they had introduced him was of a description altogether different from any which he had formerly known."—"Between the man of rustic life," says Burns, after his arrival in Edinburgh, "and the polite world, I observed little difference. In the former, though unpolished by fashion, and unenlightened by science, I had found much observation and much intelligence. But a refined and accomplished woman was a being altogether new to me, and of which I had formed but a very inadequate idea." It is plain that the Poet, when he uttered these words, was close at the ear of one of those "high-exalted courteous dames," and making himself acceptable to her by flattery and by eloquence. It is also evident that the Professor's notions of love were not at all poetic. To regulate our affections according as knowledge raises woman in the scale, is paying a very pretty compliment to education; but it is most unjust to nature. True

love pays no regard to such distinctions. We see a form—we see a face, which awaken emotions within us never before felt. The form is not perhaps the most perfect, nor the face the most fair in the land; yet we persist in admiring—in loving them :—in short, we have found out by the free-masonry of feeling, the help-mate which Heaven designed for us, and we woo and win our object.

But in what were the ladies of the polished circles of the land superior to a well-favoured, well-formed, well-bred lass of low degree, who had a light foot for a dance, a melodious voice for a song, two witching eyes, with wit at will, and who believed the man who loved her to be the greatest genius in the world? These are captivating qualities to all, save those who weigh the merits of woman in a golden balance. Nay, in the very thing on which the Professor imagines a high and polished dame to be strong, she will be found weak. The shepherd maidens and rustic lasses of Scotland feel, from their unsophisticated state of mind, the beauty of the poetry of Burns deeply and devoutly; for once that a song of his is heard in the lighted hall, it is heard fifty times on the brook- banks and in the pastoral vallies of the land.

His marriage reconciled the Poet to his wife's kindred: there was no wedding-portion. Armour was a most respectable man, but not opulent. He gave his daughter some small store of plenishing; and, exerting his skill as a mason, wrought his already eminent son-in-law a handsome punch-bowl in Inverary marble, which Burns lived to fill often,

to the great pleasure both of himself and his friends. To make bridal-presents is a practice of long standing in Scotland; and it is to the credit of the personal character of the Poet that he was not forgotten. Mrs. Dunlop bethought her of Ellisland, and gave a beautiful heifer:—another friend contributed a plough. The young couple, from a love of country, ordered their furniture—plain, indeed, and homely—from Morison, a wright in Mauchline: the farm-servants, male and female, were hired in Ayrshire, a matter of questionable prudence; for the mode of cultivation is different from that of the west, and the cold humid bottom of Mossgiel bears no resemblance to the warm and stony loam of Ellisland.

PART III:—ELLISLAND.

In the month of May, 1788, Burns made his appearance as a farmer in Nithsdale; his fame had flown before him, and his coming was expected. Ellisland is beautifully situated on the south side of the Nith, some six miles above Dumfries: it joins the grounds of Friars-Carse, on the north-west—the estate of Isle towards the south-east—the great road from Glasgow separates it from the hills of Dunscore; while the Nith, a pure stream running over the purest gravel, divides it from the holms and groves of Dalswinton. The farm

amounts to upwards of a hundred acres, and is part holm and part croft-land; the former, a deep rich loam, bears fine tall crops of wheat; the latter, though two-thirds loam and one-third stones on a bottom of gravel, yields, when carefully cultivated, good crops, both of potatoes and corn; yet to a stranger the soil must have looked unpromising or barren; and Burns declared, after a shower had fallen on a field of new-sown and new-rolled barley, that it looked like a paved street.

Though he got possession of the farm in May, the rent did not commence till Martinmas, as the ground was uninclosed and the houses unbuilt. By the agreement, Millar granted to Burns four nineteen years leases of Ellisland, at an annual rent for the first three years of fifty pounds, and seventy pounds for the remaining seventy-three years of the tack: the Poet undertook, for a sum not exceeding three hundred pounds, to build a complete farm onstead, consisting of dwelling-house, barn, byre, stable, and sheds, and to permit the proprietor to plant with forest trees the scaur or precipitous bank along the side of the Nith, and a belt of ground towards Friars-Carse, of not more than two acres, in order to shelter the farm from the sweep of the north-west wind. Burns was assisted in the choice of the farm, and the terms on which it was taken, by one or two Ayrshire friends: there were other farms to let of a superior kind on the estate, and those were pointed out by my father, steward to the proprietor—a Lothian farmer of skill and experience—but the fine romantic look of Ellisland induced Burns to shut

his eyes on the low-lying and fertile Foregirth ; upon which my father said, " Mr. Burns, you have made a poet's—not a farmer's choice."

The Poet was now a busy and a happy man. He had houses to build, and grounds to enclose:—that he might be near both, he sought shelter in a low smoky hovel on the skirts of his farm. There he was to be found by all who had curiosity or taste, with a table, books, and drawings before him ; sometimes writing letters about the land, and the people among whom he had dropt like a slung stone ; sometimes giving audience to workmen who were busy at dyking or digging foundations ; and not unfrequently brushing up, as Mrs. Burns said, an old song for Johnson's Musical Museum.—" The hovel which I shelter in," said the Poet to Margaret Chalmers, " is pervious to every blast that blows, and every shower that falls ; and I am only preserved from being chilled to death by being suffocated with smoke. I do not find my farm that pennyworth I was taught to expect, but I believe in time it may be a saving bargain."

If Burns had little comfort in his lodging-place, he seems to have been unfortunate in finding society to render it endurable.—" I am here," he says, " on my farm ; but for all that pleasureable part of life called social communication, I am at the very elbow of existence. The only things that are to be found in perfection in this country are stupidity and canting. Prose they only know in graces and prayers ; and the value of these they estimate as they do their plaiding-webs—

by the ell. As for the Muses, they have as much an idea of a rhinoceros as of a poet. For my old capricious, but good-natured hussy of a muse—

> 'By banks of Nith I sat and wept,
> When Coila I thought on;
> In midst thereof I hung my harp
> The willow trees upon.'

I am generally about half my time in Ayrshire with my 'darling Jean;' and then I, at lucid intervals, throw my horny fist across my be-cob-webbed lyre, much in the same manner as an old wife throws her hand across the spokes of her spinning-wheel."

Nor did his neighbours gain on him by a closer acquaintance.—"I was yesterday," he says, "at Mr. Millar's, to dinner, for the first time. My reception was to my mind—from the lady of the house quite flattering. She sometimes hits on a couplet or two impromptu. She repeated one or two to the admiration of all present; my suffrage, as a professional man, was expected; I for once went agonizing over the belly of my conscience. Pardon me, my adored household gods, independence of spirit and integrity of soul! In the course of the conversation, Johnson's Musical Museum, a collection of Scottish songs, with the music, was talked of. We got a song on the harpsichord, beginning

> 'Raving winds around her blowing.'

The air was much admired: the lady of the house asked me whose were the words—'Mine, madam; they are, indeed, my very best verses.' She took not the smallest notice of them. The old Scottish proverb says well—'King's chaff is better than

other folk's corn.' I was going to make a New Testament quotation about 'casting pearls;' but that would be too virulent, for the lady is actually a woman of sense and taste."

The sooty shealing in which the Poet found refuge seems to have infected his whole atmosphere of thought; the Maxwells, the Kirkpatricks, and Dalzells were fit companions for any man in Scotland in point of courtesy and information, and they were almost his neighbours; Riddell, of Friars-Carse, an accomplished antiquarian, lived next door; and Jean Lindsay, and her husband Patrick Millar, were no ordinary people. The former was beautiful and accomplished; wrote easy and graceful verses, and had a natural dignity in her manners which became her station: the latter was one of the most remarkable men of his time; an improver and inventor, and the first who applied steam to the purposes of navigation. Burns was resolved to be discontented—at least on paper—for in his conversation he exhibited no symptoms of the kind; but talked, laughed, jested, and visited with the ease and air of a man happy and full of hope.

The walls of the Poet's onstead began now to be visible from the north side of the Nith, and the rising structures were visited by all who were desirous of seeing how he wished to house himself. The plans were simple: the barn seemed too small for the extent of the farm, and the house for the accommodation of a large family. It contained an ample kitchen, which was to serve for dining-room; a room to hold two beds, a closet to hold one, and a

garret, coom-cieled, to contain others for the female servants. One of the windows looked down the holms, another opened on the river, and the house stood so nigh the lofty bank that its afternoon shadow fell across the stream upon the opposite fields. The garden was a little way from the house; a pretty footpath led southward along the river side; another ran northward, affording fine views of the Nith, and of the groves of Friars-Carse and Dalswinton; while, half-way down the steep declivity, a fine, clear, cool spring supplied water to the household. The situation was picturesque, and at the same time convenient for the purposes of the farm.

During the progress of the work, Burns was often to be found walking among the men, urging them on, and eyeing with an anxious look the tedious process of uniting lime and stone. On laying the foundation he took off his hat, and asked a blessing on the home which was to shelter his household gods. I inquired of the man who told me this, if Burns did not put forth his hand and help him in the progress of the work?—" Ay, that he did mony a time. If he saw us like to be beat wi' a big stane he would cry, 'bide a wee!' and come rinning. We soon found out when he put to his hand—he beat a' I ever met for a dour lift." When the walls rose as high as the window-heads, he sent a note into Dumfries ordering wood for the interior lintels. Twenty carpenters flocked round the messenger, all eager to look at the Poet's hand-writing. In such touches the admiration of the country is well expressed.

These days have been numbered by Currie among the golden days of Burns. Few of his days were golden, and most of them were full of trouble; but his period of truest happiness seems to have been that which preceded and followed the first Edinburgh edition of his poems. Those were, it is true, days of feverish enjoyment; but the tide of his fortune, or at least of his hopes, was at the full. The way before him was all sunshine; and as his ambition was equal to his genius, he indulged in splendid visions of fame and glory. The neglect of the Scottish nobles rebuked his spirit; he came to Dumfriesshire a saddened and dissatisfied man; he saw that his bread must be gained by the sweat of his brow; that the original curse, from which men without a moiety of his intellect were relieved, had fallen heavy upon him; and that he must plod labour's dull weary round, like an ox in a threshing-mill. The happiness present to his fancy now was less bright and ethereal than before; he had to hope for heavy crops, rising markets, and fortunate bargains. At a harvest-home or a penny-wedding he might expect to have his health drank, and hear one of his songs sung; but this was not enough to satisfy ambition such as his. Among the rising walls of his onstead, he

"Cheeped like some bewildered chicken,
Scared frae its minnie and the cleckin
By hoodie craw,"

and complained to Mrs. Dunlop of the uncouth cares and novel plans which hourly insulted his awkward ignorance. These uncouth cares were the

labours of a farm, and the novel plans were the intricate and laborious elegancies of a plain onstead!

I have heard my father allege that Burns looked like a man restless and of unsettled purpose.—"He was ever on the move," said he, "on foot or on horseback: In the course of a single day he might be seen holding the plough, angling in the river, sauntering with his hands behind his back on the banks, looking at the running water, of which he was very fond, walking round his buildings, or over his fields; and if you lost sight of him for an hour, perhaps you might see him returning from Friars-Carse, or spurring his horse through the Nith to spend an evening in some distant place with such friends as chance threw in his way." The account which he gives of himself is much to the same purpose.—"There is," said he, a foggy atmosphere native to my soul in the hour of care, which makes the dreary objects seem larger than life. Extreme sensibility, irritated and prejudiced on the gloomy side by a series of misfortunes and disappointments at that period of my existence when the soul is laying in her cargo of ideas for the voyage of life, is, I believe, the principal cause of this unhappy frame of mind."

He loved to complain:—"My increasing cares," he says, "in this as yet strange country—gloomy conjectures in the dark vista of futurity—consciousness of my own inabilty for the struggle of the world —my broadened mark to misfortune in a wife and children—I could indulge these reflections till my humour should ferment into the most acid chagrin that

would corrode the very thread of life." These are the sentiments of one resolved not to be comforted. —"The heart of the man, and the fancy of the poet, are the two grand considerations," he observed, "for which I live. If miry ridges and dirty dunghills are to engross the best part of the functions of my soul immortal, I had better been a rook or a magpie at once, and then I should not have been plagued with any ideas superior to breaking of clods and picking up grubs, not to mention barn-door cocks or mallards—creatures with which I could almost exchange lives at any time." To Margaret Chalmers he writes in a mood a shade or so brighter: —"When I think I have met with you, and have lived more of real life with you in eight days than I can do with almost any body I meet with in eight years; when I think on the improbability of meeting you in this world again—I could sit down and cry like a child," After this we are scarcely prepared for his saying, "you will be pleased to hear that I have laid aside idle éclat, and bind every day after my reapers."

Between the farm of Ellisland and the village of Mauchline lies a dreary road, forty-six miles long; and along this not very romantic path Burns was in the habit of riding more frequently than was for the advantage of his pocket or his farm. It is true that it was Mrs. Burns who made him look to the west, and it is also true that a man should love and honour his wife; but it seems not to have occurred to the Poet that strict economy and a vigilant look-out upon his farming operations was the most substan-

tial way of paying respect to her. His jaunts were frequent; he tarried long, and there were pleasant lingerings by the way—brought about by inclination sometimes, and sometimes by wind and rain. All this was much to be regretted, and it arose mainly from want of a residence for Mrs. Burns and his children near the farm which he superintended. He complains to Ainslie of want of time. He was not one of those who could sit quietly and let matters take their course: he had all the impatience of genius and not a little of its irritability.

In one of his Ayrshire excursions, he found the inn at which he usually got a night's lodging filled with mourners conveying the body of a lady of some note in the west to her family tomb; he was obliged to ride ten miles to another inn. The fruit of his vexation was an ode lavish of insult:—

"Dweller in yon dungeon dark,
Hangman of creation, mark
Who in widowed weeds appears,
Laden with unhonoured years.
Note that eye—'tis rheum o'erflows—
Pity's flood there never rose:
See those hands, ne'er stretched to save;
Hands that took, but never gave."

In these words, and others bitterer still, the Poet avenged himself on the memory of a frugal and respectable lady, whose body unconsciously deprived him of a night's sleep.

Some will like better, some worse, the reproof which he gave to Kirkpatrick, the minister of Dunscore, for preaching down "the bloody and tyrannical house of Stewart." The Poet went to the parish church to join in acknowledgments for the Revolu-

tion to which we are indebted for civil and religious rights. The stern and uncompromising divine touched the yet lingering jacobitical prejudices of Burns so sharply, that he seemed ready to start from his seat and leave the church.

On going home he wrote thus to the London Star:—"Bred and educated in revolution principles—the principles of reason and common sense—it could not be any silly prejudice which made my heart revolt at the abusive manner in which the reverend gentleman threatened the house of Stewart. We may rejoice sufficiently in our deliverance from past evils without cruelly raking up the ashes of those whose misfortune it was, perhaps, as much as their crime, to be the authors of those evils. The Stewarts only contended for prerogatives which they knew their predecessors enjoyed, and which they saw their contemporaries enjoying; but these prerogatives were inimical to the happiness of a nation, and the rights of subjects. Whether it was owing to the wisdom of leading individuals, or to the jostling of parties, I cannot pretend to determine: but, happily for us, the kingly power was shifted into another branch of the family, who, as they owed the throne solely to the call of a free people, could claim nothing inconsistent with the covenanted terms which placed them there. Let every man who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent; and let every Briton, and particularly every Scotchman, who ever looked with reverential pity on the dotage of a

parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the kings of his forefathers."

The eloquent humanity of this appeal was thrown away, perhaps, upon an intrepid Calvinist, to whom the good things of this world were as dust in the balance compared to what he deemed his duty to God and his conscience.—"You must have heard," says Burns in a letter to Nicol, "how Lawson of Kirkmahoe, seconded by Kirkpatrick of Dunscore, and the rest of that faction, have accused, in formal process, the unfortunate Heron of Kirkgunzeon, that, in ordaining Neilson to the cure of souls in Kirkbean, he feloniously and treasonably bound him to the Confession of Faith, as far as it was agreeable to reason and the word of God." The Poet was unfortunate in his respect for those Galloway apostles: for worth and true nobleness of mind, Lawson and Kirkpatrick were as high above them as Criffel is above Solway. He was wayward and scarcely to be trusted in his arguments on religious topics:—a Cameronian boasted to me how effectually Burns interposed between him and two members of the established kirk, who were crushing him with a charge of heresy.—"The Poet," said he, "proved the established kirk to be schismatic, and the poor broken remnant to be the true light. Never believe me if he wasna a gude man."

A secluded walk, or a solitary ride, were to Burns what the lonely room and the evening lamp are said to be to others who woo the muse. Though sharp and sarcastic in his correspondence, he was kindly and obliging in other matters. He had formed a

friendship with the family of Friars-Carse, and was indulged with a key which admitted him when he pleased to the beautiful grounds—to the rare collections of antique crosses, troughs, altars, and other inscribed stones of Scotland's elder day—and to what the Poet did not love less, a beautiful Hermitage, in the centre of the grove next to Ellisland. He rewarded this indulgence by writing an inscription. At first the poem was all contained on one pane of glass; but his fancy overflowed such limits :—

"Thou whom chance may hither lead,
Be thou clad in russet weed,
Be thou deck'd in silken stole,
Grave these maxims on thy soul:—
Life is but a day at most,
Sprung from night, in darkness lost;
Hope not sunshine every hour;
Fear not clouds will always lower.
* * *
Stranger, go! Heaven be thy guide!
Quod the Beadsman of Nithside."

These sentiments shew the colour of the Poet's mind rather than its original vigour. He was happier in a poem addressed to Grahame of Fintray; it is rich in observation, and abounds with vivid pictures, some of them darkening into the stern and the sarcastic :—

"Thee, Nature! partial Nature! I arraign;
Of thy caprice maternal I complain.
Thou giv'st the ass his hide, the snail his shell,
Th' envenomed wasp victorious guards his cell;
Toads with their poison, doctors with their drug,
The priest and hedge-hog in their robes are snug.
But, oh! thou bitter step-mother, and hard
To thy poor fenceless naked child—the Bard!
A thing unteachable in worldly skill,
And half an idiot too—more helpless still;
No nerves olfactory, Mammon's trusty cur,
Clad in rich Dulness' comfortable fur,
In naked feeling, and in aching pride,
He bears the unbroken blast on every side;

Vampyre booksellers drain him to the heart,
And scorpion critics cureless venom dart.
Critics !—appall'd I venture on the name;
Those cut-throat bandits in the paths of fame,
Bloody dissectors, worse than ten Monro's;
He hacks to teach—they mangle to expose."

The fine satire and graceful supplication of these lines make us regret that they were addressed to one who had nothing better in his gift than situations in the Excise.

In lyrical verse the muse of Burns was at this time somewhat sparing of her inspiration; she who loved to sing of rustic happiness in her own country tongue, was put out in her musings by the sound of masons' hammers and carpenters' saws. The first of his attempts is the exquisite song called "The Chevalier's Lament;" it was partly composed on horseback, March 30, 1788.—"Yesterday," he says to Robert Cleghorn, "as I was riding through a track of melancholy, joyless moors, between Galloway and Ayrshire, it being Sunday, I turned my thoughts to psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; and your favourite air, 'Captain O'Keane,' coming at length in my head, I tried these words to it:—

"The small birds rejoice in the green leafs returning,
The murmuring streamlet winds clear through the vale,
The hawthorn-tree blows in the dew of the morning,
And wild scatter'd cowslips bedeck the green dale;
But what can give pleasure, or what can seem fair,
While the lingering moments are numbered by care?
No flowers gaily springing, nor birds sweetly singing,
Can soothe the sad bosom of joyless despair."

He contributed some dozen songs or so this season to Johnson:—"I can easily see that you will very probably," he says, "have four volumes. Perhaps you may not find your account

lucratively in this business; but you are a patriot for the music of your country, and I am certain posterity will look upon themselves as highly indebted to your public spirit. I see every day new musical publications advertised, but what are they?—gaudy butterflies of a day; but your work will outlive the momentary neglects of idle fashion, and defy the teeth of time." Of the new songs which he wrote, "Beware of bonnie Ann" was the first; Ann, the daughter of Allan Masterton, was the heroine. "The Gardener wi' his Paidle" is another; the first verse is natural and flowing:—

"When rosy May comes in wi' flowers,
To deck the gay green spreading bowers,
Then busy, busy are his hours,
The gardener wi' his paidle:
The chrystal waters gently fa',
The merry birds are lovers a',
The scented breezes round him blaw,
The gardener wi' his paidle."

"On a Bank of Flowers," was written by desire of Johnson to replace a song of greater merit, but less delicacy, published by Ramsay. "The Day returns, my bosom burns," was composed in compliment to the bridal-day of the laird of Friars-Carse and his lady; it is very beautiful:—

"The day returns, my bosom burns,
The blissful day we twa did meet,
Though winter wild in tempest toil'd,
Ne'er simmer sun was half sae sweet."

"At their fire-side," says the Poet, "I have enjoyed more pleasant evenings than at all the houses of fashionable people in this country put together." "Go fetch to me a pint o' wine," Burns introduced to his brother Gilbert as an old song which he had

found among the glens of Nithsdale, and asked if he did not think it beautiful.—"Beautiful?" said Gilbert; "it is not only that, but the most heroic of lyrics. Ah, Robert! if you would write oftener that way, your fame would be surer." He also copied it out, as a work of the olden muse, to Mrs. Dunlop; the second verse is magnificent:—

"The trumpets sound, the banners fly,
  The glittering spears are ranked ready;
The shouts o' war are heard afar,
  The battle closes thick and bloody:
But it's not the roar o' sea or shore
  Wad make me longer wish to tarry,
Nor shouts o' war that's heard afar—
  It's leaving thee, my bonnie Mary."

He was fond of passing off his own compositions as the labours of forgotten bards; "Auld lang syne" he spoke of to Mrs. Dunlop as a song that had ofted thrilled through his soul; nor did he hesitate to recommend it to Thomson as a lyric of other days which had never been in print, nor even in manuscript, till he took it down from an old woman's singing. Many a Scottish heart will respond in far lands to the following lines:—

"We twa hae run about the braes,
  An' pou'd the gowans fine,
But we've wandered mony a weary foot
  Since auld lang syne.
We twa hae paidlet i' the burn
  Frae morning sun till dine,
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
  Since auld lang syne."

The desponding spirit of the Poet is visible in the song of "The lazy mist."—"I'll never wish to hear it sung again," said a farmer to me once ' it is enough to make one quit plough-hilts and harrow,

and turn hermit." "A' the airts the wind can blaw" is as cheerful as the other is sorrowful.—"I composed it," said the Poet, "out of compliment to Mrs. Burns; it was during the honey-moon." It was the fruit of one of his horseback meditations, when riding to Mossgiel from Ellisland, with his rising onstead, his new-sown crop, and the charms of Jean Armour's company in his mind. He made it by the way, and sung it to his wife when he arrived. There are four verses altogether; two of them are not commonly printed, though both are beautiful:—

"O blaw ye wastlin' winds, blaw saft
Amang the leafy trees,
And frae each fragrant hill and vale
Bring hame the laden bees;
And bring the lassie back to me
That's aye sae neat an' clean;
Ae smile o' her wou'd banish care,
Sae charming is my Jean."

The verses with which Burns eked out and amended the old lyrics are worthy of notice. There is some happy patching in "Tibbie Dunbar:"—

"I care na thy daddie, his lands and his money;
I care na thy kindred sae high and sae lordly;
But say thou wilt hae me for better for waur,
And come in thy coatie, sweet Tibbie Dunbar."

In "The Tailor fell thro' the bed, thimbles an' a;" and in "Ay waukin, O," are two or three of the Burns' touches. In "My Love she's but a lassie yet" his hand is more visible:—

My love she's but a lassie yet,
My love she's but a lassie yet;
We'll let her stand a year or twa,
She'll no be half sae saucy yet:
I rue the day I sought her, O,
I rue the day I sought her, O;
Wha gets her need na say he's wooed,
But he may say he's bought her, O."

Having cut and secured his crop, seen his stable for holding four horses, his byre for containing ten cows erected, and his dwelling-house rendered nearly habitable, he went into Ayrshire in the middle of November, and, in the first week of the succeeding month, returned with Mrs. Burns, and some cart-loads of plenishing to Ellisland. He was visited on this occasion by many of his neighbours; the gladsome looks and the kindly manners of his young wife made a favourable impression on all; and at his house-heating, "Luck to the roof-tree of the house of Burns!" was drunk by the men, and some of his songs sung by the lasses of Nithsdale. He was looked upon now as having struck root as a poet and a farmer, and as both was welcome to the people of the vale around. Yet his coming brought something like alarm to a few: the ruder part of the peasantry dreaded being pickled and preserved in sarcastic song. An old farmer told me, that at a penny-pay wedding, when one or two wild young fellows began to quarrel and threatened to fight, Burns rose up and said, "Sit down, an' be damned to you! else I'll hing ye up like potatoe-bogles, in sang to-morrow." —"They ceased and sat down," said my informant, "as if their noses had been bleeding."

In the letters and verses of the Poet at this period, we can see a picture of his mind and feelings.—"I own myself," said he, "so little of a presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion. This day (January 1, 1789), the first Sunday in May; a breezy, blue-skyed noon, sometime about the beginning, and a hoary

morning and calm sunny day about the end of autumn; these, time out of mind, have been to me a kind of holiday. We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, make no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the harebell, the foxglove, the wild-brier-rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature, and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave." Thus eloquently could Burns discourse upon his own emotions; he was willing to accept, as proofs of an immortal spirit within him, the poetic stirrings of his own sensibility.

That Burns imagined he had united the poet, farmer, and exciseman all happily in his own person, was a dream in which he indulged only during the first season that he occupied Ellisland. When he thought of his bargain with Millar, his natural engagement with the muse, and of his increasing

family, he was not unconscious that he had taxed mind and body to the uttermost: poetry was not then, more than now, a productive commodity, and he could not expect a harvest such as he had reaped in Edinburgh every year. A farm such as his, required the closest, nay, most niggardly, economy to to make it pay; and he was not, therefore, unwise in leaning to the Excise to help out with a little ready and certain money the deficiencies of his other speculations. As yet, however, his hopes were high, and his spirit untouched, when he said—

> "Come, firm Resolve, take thou the van,
> Thou stalk o' carle-hemp in man:"

he was bracing himself up for the contest. Such fits of thought generally with him ushered in verse. When visions of fame and honest hard-earned independence passed before his sight, Burns slipt out to the "Scaur's red side," and pacing to and fro, indicated by the humming of some favourite tune, that he was busy with song. Nay, it was not unusual with him to go out, "attired as minstrels wont to be," with his head uncovered—his ancestor's broad sword buckled to his side; and, traversing the river-bank in the glimpses of the moon, chaunt in a voice, deep, low, and melodious the verses which rose on his fancy. In one of these moods he produced "I hae a wife o' my ain," a rude and rather indecorous ditty, but full of the character of the man, and breathing of resolution and independence:—

> "I hae a penny to spend,
> There—thanks to naebody;
> I hae naething to lend,
> I'll borrow frae naebody.

"I am naebody's lord,
I'll be slave to naebody;
I hae a gude braid sword—
I'll tak dunts frae naebody."

Burns indulged in the wish to compose a work, less desultory, and more the offspring of meditation than those short and casual pieces which were rather the sport of his vacant hours than the result of settled study and deliberate thought. Something like the "Georgics of Virgil," a kind of composition for which he was well fitted, both by genius and knowledge, seems to have hovered before his fancy.—"It is a species of writing," he observed, "entirely new to me, and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation; but, alas! when I read the Georgics, and then survey my own powers, 'tis like the idea of a Shetland pony drawn up by the side of a thorough-bred hunter to start for the plate." These words were addressed to Mrs. Dunlop; he afterwards says to Dr. Moore:—"The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I have no doubt but the knack, the aptitude, to learn the Muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him who forms the secret bias of the soul; but I as firmly believe that excellence in the profession is the fruit of industry, attention, labour, and pains; at least, I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the press I put off to a very distant day—a day that may never arrive; but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour." The critics of those days seem not to have felt that he had already taken a flight above any bard of his time;

they regarded the "Address to the Diel," "The Daisy," "The Mouse," and "The Cottar's Saturday Night" as "Orient pearls at random strung;" and held that their worth had yet to be decided by future works of more sustained excellence. This seems to have perplexed Burns: such opinions pointed to a school of verse in which he had never studied.

The Poet did not flourish; yet he seems to have done enough to ensure success as a farmer. He held the plough frequently with his own hands; and he loved to lay aside his coat, and with a sowing-sheet slung across his shoulder, stride over the new-turned furrows, and commit his seed-corn to the ground.—While his wife managed the cheese and butter department with something short of West country skill, he attended fairs where grain was sold, and sales where cattle were disposed of; and, though not averse to a merry-making or a dance, he seems neither to have courted nor shunned them.—"Do you come and see me," he says to Richard Browne; "we must have a social day, and perhaps lengthen it out with half the night before you go again to sea. You are the earliest friend I now have on earth, my brothers excepted; and is not that an endearing circumstance? When you and I first met, we were at a green period of human life. The twig could easily take a bent, but would as easily return to its former state. You and I not only took a mutual bent, but, by the melancholy though strong influence of being both of the family of the unfortunates, we were intertwined with one

another in our growth towards advanced age; and blasted be the sacrilegious hand that shall attempt to undo the union!" He loved old friendships to continue, and rejoiced in the happiness of his early companions.

The diffusion of knowledge was a favourite object with Burns; for this he had established his reading and debating-clubs in the west, and in the same spirit he now desired to excite a love of literature among the portioners and peasants of Dunscore. He undertook the management of a small parochial library, and wrote out the rules. His friend Gordon, the writer, happened to drop in while he was busy with the regulations, and began to criticise the language—a matter on which the bard was sensitive.—"Come, come, sir," said he, "let me have my rules again. Had I employed a Dumfries lawyer to draw them out, he would have given me bad latin, worse greek, and english spoken in the fourteenth century." Mr. Riddell, of Friars-Carse, and other gentlemen, contributed money and books. The library commenced briskly, but soon languished. The Poet could not always be present at the meetings; the subscribers lived far separate; disputes and disunion crept in, and it died away like a flower which fades for want of watering. Burns alludes ironically to the scheme in one of his letters. Wisdom, he averred, might be gained by the mere handling of books. One night, he said, while he presided in the library, a tailor, who lived some mile or so distant, turned over and over the leaves of a folio Hebrew concordance, the gift of a

clergyman.—" I advised him," said Burns, "to bind the book on his back—he did so; and Stitch, in a dozen walks between the library and his own house, acquired as much rational theology as the priest had done by forty years' perusal of the pages." These sort of ironical sallies were not likely to allure subscribers, or give knowledge to the ignorant.

Some have hinted that his appointment in the Excise was unfortunate, as it led to the temptations of pleasant company and social excess. There is no situation under the sun free from this; even a farmer is as much exposed to such allurements as any one. The Poet, a good judge in all such matters, looked with a different eye upon it; nor is there any thing too romantic in the wish that journeying along the green vales and among the fine hills of Nithsdale and Galloway might inspire his muse, and aid him in poetic composition.—" I do not know," he said to Ainslie, " if I have informed you that I am now appointed to an Excise division, in the middle of which my house and farm lie. I know not how the word exciseman, or still more opprobrious gauger, will sound in your ears. I, too, have seen the day when my auditory nerves would have felt very delicately on this subject; but a wife and children have a wonderful power in blunting these kind of sensations. Fifty pounds a-year for life, and a provision for widows and orphans, you will allow, is no bad settlement for a *poet*. For the ignominy of the profession, I have the encouragement which I once heard a recruiting-serjeant give to a numerous, if not a respectable, audience in the

streets of Kilmarnock :—' Gentlemen, for your farther and better encouragement, I can assure you that our regiment is the most blackguard corps under the crown; and consequently, with us, an honest man has the surest chance for preferment.' "

In the same strain he writes to his friend Blacklock :—

"But what d'ye think, my trusty fere,
I'm turn'd a gauger.—Peace be here!
Parnassian queans, I fear, I fear,
Ye'll now disdain me,
And then my fifty pounds a-year
Will little gain me.

"Ye glaiket, gleesome, dainty damies,
Wha by Castalia's wimplin' streamies
Lowp, sing, and lave your pretty limbies,
Ye ken, ye ken,
That strang necessity supreme is
'Mang sons o' men.

"I hae a wife and twa wee laddies,
They maun hae brose and brats o' duddies;
Ye ken yoursel my heart right proud is—
I need na vaunt;
But I'll sned besoms' thraw saugh woodies,
Before they want."

In these verses we read of the man as well as the poet; he put more of himself into all he wrote than any other poet ancient or modern.

"His farm," says Currie, "no longer occupied the principal part of his care or his thoughts. It was not at Ellisland that he was now in general to be found. Mounted on horseback, this high-minded Poet was pursuing the defaulters of the revenue among the hills and vales of Nithsdale, his roving eye wandering over the charms of nature, and muttering his wayward fancies as he moved along." Currie means something like censure in this passage. The Poet had a duty, and an arduous one, to

perform ; his district reached far and wide ; he was everpunctual in his attendance, and though he might plough and sow, reap and graze, Ellisland by deputy ; it required his own eyes and hands to superintend the revenue in ten parishes. That he acquitted himself diligently, but gently, in his vocation, there is abundance of proof; against the regular smuggler his looks were stern and his hand was heavy, while to the poor country dealer he was mild and lenient. The Poet and a brother exciseman one day suddenly entered a widow woman's shop in Dunscore, and made a seizure of smuggled tobacco.—" Jenny," said the Poet, " I expected this would be the upshot ; here, Lewars, take note of the number of rolls as I count them. Now, Jock, did ye ever hear an auld wife numbering her threads before check-reels were invented ? Thou's ane, and thou's no ane, and thou's ane a' out—listen." As he handed out the rolls, he went on with his humorous enumeration, but dropping every other roll into Janet's lap. Lewars took the desired note with much gravity, and saw as if he saw not the merciful conduct of his companion. Another information had been lodged against a widow who kept a small public-house in Thornhill ; it was a fair-day—her house was crowded—Burns came suddenly to the back door and said, " Kate, are ye mad ?—the supervisor and me will be in on ye in half an hour !" This merciful hint—out of which a very serious charge might be made—saved the poor woman from ruin.

The muse, as he expected, accompanied Burns in his gauging excursions. He had occasion to be at

Lochmaben; Maxwell, then provost of that very small but very ancient borough, was his correspondent:—he was also acquainted with that "worthy veteran in religion and good fellowship, the Reverend Mr. Jeffrey." At the manse of the latter, he met "the blue-ey'd lass" in his daughter Jean, then a rosy girl of seventeen, with winning manners and laughing blue eyes. The Poet drank tea and spent the evening in the manse; and next morning, greatly to the increase of her blushes, sent her the song which has made her immortal:—

"I gaed a waefu' gate yestreen,
A gate, I fear, I'll dearly rue;
I gat my death frae twa sweet een,
Twa laughing een o' bonnie blue:
She talk'd, she smiled, my heart she wil'd,
She charm'd my soul, I wistna how;
But aye the stound, the deadly wound,
Came frae her een sae bonnie blue."

In April, he wrote the poem of "The wounded hare;" he has himself described the circumstances under which he composed it; his account was confirmed to me by James Thomson, the son of a neighbouring farmer.—"I remember Burns," said he, "weel; I have some cause to mind him—he used to walk in the twilight along the side of the Nith, near the march, between his land and ours. Once I shot at a hare that was busy on our braird; she ran bleeding past Burns; he cursed me and ordered me out of his sight, else he would throw me into the water. I'm told he has written a poem about it."—"Aye, that he has," I replied; "but do you think he would have thrown you into the Nith?"—"Thrown! aye, I'll warrant would he, though I was

baith young and strong." He submitted the poem—certainly not one of his best—to Dr. Gregory; the result scared him from consulting in future professional critics.—"I believe," he said, "in the iron justice of Dr. Gregory; but I believe and tremble." Such criticisms tend to crush the spirit out of man.

The applause which his next attempt obtained, afforded some consolation for such merciless strictures; this was the song "O! were I on Parnassus' hill;" the heroine was Mrs. Burns; the transition from the "forked hill" and "fabled fount" of the heathen to a nearer stream and Scottish mount of inspiration, has been much admired.

"O! were I on Parnassus' hill,
Or had o' Helicon my fill,
That I might catch poetic skill,
To sing how dear I love thee;
But Nith maun be my muse's well,
My muse maun be thy bonnie sel',
On Corsincon I'll glow'r and spell,
And write how dear I love thee."

He presented the song to Miss Staig, an accomplished young lady of Dumfries, saying, "should the respectful timidity of any one of her lovers deny him power of speech, it would be charitable to teach him 'O! were I on Parnassus' hill,' so that he might not lie under the double imputation of being neither able 'to sing nor say.'"

The thoughts of Burns had travelled far from Corsincon and the waters of the Nith, when he wrote "My heart's in the Highlands." The words suit a Gaelic air, and have much of the northern spirit in them:—

"My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;
My heart's in the Highlands a chasing the deer,

A chasing the wild deer and following the roe;
My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go."

Nor were his thoughts at his own fire-side when he penned his humorous and sarcastic ditty, "Whistle owre the lave o't." Wedded infelicity is the theme of many of our old minstrels :—

" Meg was meek and Meg was mild,
Sweet and harmless as a child—
Wiser men than me's beguiled ;
Whistle owre the lave o't.

His fancy was now and then fond of " stepping westward ;" this is sufficiently indicated in his " Braes o' Ballochmyle," a strain which appears to intimate that he had overlooked the neglect which wounded him in " The Lass o' Ballochmyle ;" and with deeper feeling still in his " To Mary in Heaven," written near the close of September, 1789. The circumstances under which the latter lyric was composed pressed painfully on the mind of his wife.— " Robert," she said, " though ill of a cold, had busied himself all day with the shearers in the field, and, as he had got much of the crop in, was in capital spirits. But when the gloaming came, he grew sad about something—he could not rest. He wandered first up the water-side, and then went to the barn-yard ; and I followed him, begging him to come in, as he was ill, and the air was cold and sharp. He always promised, but still remained where he was, striding up and down, and looking at the clear sky, and particularly at a star that shone like another moon. He then threw himself down on some loose sheaves, still continuing to gaze at

the star." When he came in he seemed deeply dejected, and sat down and wrote the first verse :—

"Thou lingering star, with lessening ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usherest in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
O Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hearest thou the groans that rend his breast?"

On this touching topic he writes to Mrs. Dunlop :—"Can it be possible that, when I resign this frail feverish being, I shall still find myself in conscious existence? When the last gasp of agony has announced that I am no more to those who knew me, and the few who loved me; when the cold unconscious corse is resigned to the earth to be the prey of reptiles, and become a trodden clod, shall I be yet warm in life, seeing and seen—enjoying and enjoyed? If there is another life, it must be only for the just, the benevolent, the amiable, and the humane. What a flattering idea, then, is a world to come! There shall I, with speechless agony of rapture, again recognize my lost—my ever dear Mary! whose bosom was fraught with truth, honour, constancy, and love." Few wives would interpret these melancholy allusions into happiness for themselves. Mrs. Burns seems to have conducted herself with much gentleness.

These melancholy moods seldom lasted long—and they were generally relieved by verse. Poetry, therefore, had some share in them. Nor was it unnatural, when the world pressed and the cloud

descended, for Burns to cheer the present by bright images of the past. Had fortune been more kind, he would have looked less at the Highland-Mary star, and indulged, probably, in strains of a more enlivening nature. In those days the Poet describes himself as the prey of nervous affections.—"I cannot reason," he says, "I cannot think; I would not venture to write any thing above an order to a cobbler. You have felt too much of the ills of life not to sympathize with a diseased wretch, who is impaired in more than half of any faculties he possessed."

Yet in the same season he wrote his joyous strain, "Willie brewed a peck o' maut." The history of the song involves that of the Poet. Nicol, by the advice of Burns, bought the farm of Laggan in his neighbourhood, and in the autumn vacation came to look after his purchase. Allan Masterton accompanied him, and summoning the bard, they resolved to have a "house-heating." Nicol furnished the table, Burns produced the song, and Masterton set it to music. All these lyrics, and others of scarcely inferior merit, were printed in the third volume of the Musical Museum. The song called "The banks of Nith" partakes of the sobriety of verses written to please a friend. In vain the Poet thinks of Thames flowing proudly to the sea, and of the Nith,

"Where Comyns ance had high command."

His muse will not be satisfied till he gives her license upon another strain—the song of "Tam

Glen." Thought flows free, and words "come skelpin' rank and file," in this happy lyric. The heroine has set her heart on honest Tam, and, in spite of the persuasions and bribes of her relations, perseveres in her attachment. Besides his personal qualities, there are other reasons of weight:—

"The last Halloween I was wauken,
My drouket sark-sleeve, as ye ken;
His likeness came up the house stauken—
The very grey breeks o' Tam Glen."

Burns went to a school in which the master caused his scholars to sing this song. The Poet was hard to please in matters of sentiment, and said, "Children can't do such things, sir; they sing, but it is without feeling."

He had now made the acquaintance and acquired the friendship of some of the chief families in the vale of Nith; the doors of Friars-Carse, Terraughty, Blackwood, Closeburn, Barjarg, Dalswinton, Glenae, Kirkconnel, and Arbigland were opened to receive and to welcome him; nor were those of Drumlanrig shut. The Duke of Queensberry was represented by John M'Murdo, who had taste to appreciate the merits of such a man as Burns. In one of his letters to that gentleman, he says, in his usual characteristic way,—"A poet and a beggar are in so many points of view alike, that one might take them for the same individual character under different designations; were it not that though, with a trifling license, most poets may be styled beggars, yet the converse of the proposition does not hold that every beggar is a poet. In one particular, however, they remarkably agree: if you help either the one or the other to the

picking of a bone or a mug of ale, they will very willingly repay you with verse. I feel myself indebted to you, in the style of our ballad-printers, for 'five excellent new songs.' The enclosed is nearly my newest song, 'The Country Lass,' and one that has cost me some pains, though that is but an equivocal mark of excellence. You see, sir, what it is to patronize a poet; 'tis like being a magistrate in a petty borough; you do them the favour to preside at their council for one year, and your name bears the prefatory stigma of bailie for life. With the compliments, and the best wishes, I send the sincere prayers of the season for you, that you may see many and happy years with Mrs. M'Murdo and your family —two blessings, by-the-bye, to which your rank does not by any means entitle you; a loving wife and a fine family being almost the only good things of this life to which the farm-house has an exclusive right."

In the midst of visits given and received—acts of kindness done by gentlemen, and words of applause, more welcome still, from ladies, Burns was thoughtful and unhappy. From the pursuit of "pension, post, or place" he had withdrawn with embittered feelings to a farm, and now he found that the plough and the sickle failed to give even the rustic abundance he had contemplated. On Ellisland he had expended all his money in the first year of occupation;—in the second year he writes,—"My mind is so jaded, and racked, and bedeviled with that task of the superlatively damned—making one guinea do the business of three, that I detest and abhor the

very word business, though no less than four letters of my own short sirname are in it." He felt, too, that he had laid out his money in vain. He suspected his mistake early. It will be recollected that he said, in September 1788, "I do not find my farm the pennyworth I was taught to expect; but I believe in time it may be a saving bargain." To Dr. Moore, in January, 1789, he says: "I have married my Jean, and taken a farm: with the first step, I have every day more and more reason to be satisfied; with the last, it is rather the reverse." Still he did not despair; nay, he sometimes saw in imagination the poet-farmer high in the scale of opulence as well as fame.—"I am here in my old way," he writes to Mr. Macauley, "holding the plough, marking the growth of my corn, or the health of my dairy, and at times sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith, on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile, praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the muses, the only gipsies with whom I have now any intercourse."

The new-year's-day of 1790 wrought a change in his mind, or rather confirmed his worst suspicions: he had now brought two years' crop to the flail, and was thus enabled to weigh the certain past against future hope. We may gather the result from his words to Gilbert:—"I have not, in my present frame of mind, much appetite for exertion in writing: my nerves are in a cursed state. I feel that horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body and soul. This farm has undone my enjoyment of myself; it is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go—I'll

fight it out and be off with it." Though Ellisland promised before the fourth of the lease was done to be a saving bargain, there is no doubt that at first it was a losing one. The heart had been wrought out of the ground by preceding tenants, and the crops of grass or corn which it yielded to the Poet afforded but a bare return for labour and outlay.

The condition of a farmer in Nithsdale was in those days sufficiently humble; his one-story house had a clay floor; his furniture was made by the hands of a ploughwright; he presided at meals among his children and domestics; performed family worship "duly even and morn;" and only put on the look of a man of substance when he gave a dinner to a douce neighbour. Out of doors all was rude and slovenly: his plough was the clumsy old Scotch one; his harrows had oftener teeth of wood than of iron; his carts were heavy and low-wheeled—the axles were of wood; he winnowed his corn by means of the wind, between two barn-doors; and he refused to commit his seed to the earth till, seating himself on the ground at mid-day, it gave warmth instead of receiving it. He was too poor to make experiments, and too prejudiced to speculate. He rooted up no bushes, dug up no stones; neither did he drain nor enclose; the dung which he bestowed on the soil was to raise a crop of potatoes; now and then it received a powdering of lime. His crops corresponded with his skill and his implements; they were weak, and only enabled him to pay his rent and lay past a few pounds Scots, annually.

Much of the ground in Nithsdale was leased at

seven, ten, and some fields of more than ordinary richness, at fifteen shillings an acre. The farmer differed little in wealth and condition from the peasants around him. The war, which soon commenced, raised him in the scale of existence: the army and navy consumed much of his produce; for an hundred thousand soldiers in time of war require as much provision as two hundred thousand in times of peace. With the demand, the price of corn augmented; the farmer rose on the wings of sudden wealth above his original condition; his house obtained a slated roof and sash windows; carpets were laid on the floors, instruments of music were placed in the parlours; he wore no longer a coat of home-made cloth; he sat no longer at meals among his servants; family devotion was relinquished as a thing unfashionable, and he became a sort of rustic gentleman, who rode a blood-horse, and galloped home on market-nights at the peril of his own neck and to the terror of all humble pedestrians. His sons were educated at college, and went to the bar or got commissions in the army; his daughters changed their linsey-wolsey gowns for others of silk; carried their heads high, and blushed for their relations who were numbered among the wrights, masons, and shoemakers of the land. When a change like this took place among the farmers of the vale, the dews of wealth would have fallen at the same time on the tenant of Ellisland: but Burns was too poor and too impatient to wait long for better times; he resolved to try another year or two, and then abandon farming for ever if it refused to bring the wealth to him which it did to others.'

Having made this covenant with himself, he resumed his intercourse with the muse, and produced one of the best as well as longest of all his poems—"Tam O' Shanter." For this noble tale we are indebted to something like accident. Grose, the antiquarian, was on a visit to Riddel, of Friars-Carse, who, like himself, had a collection

"Of auld nick-nackets,
Rusty airn caps and jinglin' jackets
Wad haud the Lothians three in tackets
A towmont gude."

The Poet was invited to add wings to the evening hours, and something like friendship was established between him and the social Englishman, which both imagined would be lasting. In conversing about the antiquities of Scotland, Burns begged that Grose would introduce Alloway kirk into his projected work; and, to fix the subject on his mind, related some of the wild stories of devilry and witchcraft with which Scotland abounds. The antiquarian listened to them all, and then said, "Write a poem on it, and I'll put in the verses with an engraving of the ruin." Burns set his muse to work; he could hardly sleep for the spell that was upon him, and with his "barmy noddle working prime," walked out to his favourite path along the river-bank.

"Tam O' Shanter" was the work of a single day; the name was taken from the farm of Shanter in Kyle, the story from tradition. Mrs. Burns relates that, observing Robert walking with long swinging sort of strides and apparently muttering as he went, she let him alone for some time; at length she took the children with her and went forth to meet him; he seemed not to

observe her, but continued his walk; "on this," said she, "I stept aside with the bairns among the broom—and past us he came, his brow flushed and his eyes shining; he was reciting these lines:—

'Now Tam! O Tam! had thae been queans,
A' plump and strapping in their teens,
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hunder linen!
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush, o' gude blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them aff my hurdies!
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies!'

I wish ye had but seen him! he was in such ecstasy that the tears were happing down his cheeks." The Poet had taken writing materials with him, and leaning on a turf fence which commanded a view of the river, he committed the poem to paper, walked home, and read it in great triumph at the fire-side. It came complete and perfect from his fancy at the first heat;—no other work in the language contains such wondrous variety of genius in the same number of lines. His own account of his rapture in composition confirms the description of Mrs. Burns:—"I seized," said he to a correspondent, "my gilt-headed Wangee rod in my left hand—an instrument indispensably necessary—in the moment of inspiration and rapture, and stride, stride, quicker and quicker,—out skipt I among the broomy banks of the Nith to muse."

Burns found his tale in several prose traditions. One stormy night, amid squalls of wind and blasts of hail—in short, on such a night as the devil would choose to take the air in, a farmer was plashing homewards from the forge with plough-irons on his

shoulder. As he approached Alloway kirk, he was startled by a light glimmering in the haunted edifice; he walked up to the door, and saw a cauldron suspended over a fire, in which the heads and limbs of unchristened children were beginning to simmer. As there were neither fiend nor witch to protect it, he unhooked the cauldron, poured out the contents, and carried his trophy home, where it long remained an evidence of the truth of his story. We may observe in the poem the use made by Burns of this Kyle legend. Another story supplied him with two of his chief characters. A farmer having been detained by business in Ayr, found himself crossing the old bridge of Doon about the middle of the night. When he reached the gate of Alloway kirk-yard, a light came streaming from a Gothic window in the gabel, and he saw with surprise a batch of witches dancing merrily round their master the devil, who was keeping them in motion by the sound of his bag-pipe. The farmer stopt his horse and gazed at their gambols; he saw several old dames of his acquaintance among them; they were footing it in their smocks. Unfortunately for him, one of them wore a smock too short by a span or so, which so tickled the farmer that he burst out with "Weel luppan, Maggie wi' the short sark!" He recollected himself, turned his horse's head, and spurred and switched with all his might towards the brig of Doon, well knowing that—

"A running stream they darena cross."

When he reached the middle of the arch, one of the hags sprang to seize him, but nothing was on her

side of the stream saving the horse's tail, which gave way to her grasp as if touched by lightning.

In a Galloway version of the tradition, it is recorded that the witch, seizing the horse by the tail, stopt it in full career in the centre of the bridge; upon which the farmer struck a back-handed blow with his sword that set him free, and enabled him to pass the stream without further molestation. On reaching his own house he found, to his horror, a woman's hand hanging in his horse's tail; and next morning was informed that the handsome wife of one of his neighbours was dangerously ill, and not expected to live. He went to see her—she turned away her face from him, and obstinately refused to say what ailed her; upon which he forcibly bared her wounded arm, and, displaying the bloody hand, accused her of witchcraft and dealings with the devil; thereupon she made a confession, and was condemned and burnt. The Galloway legend was too tragic for the aim of the Poet; it would have jarred with the wild humour of the scene in the kirk, and prevented him from displaying his wondrous powers of uniting the laughable with the serious, and the witty with the awful. Cromek, a curious inquirer, was informed on the spot that the places where the packman was smothered in the snow—where drunken Charlie broke his neck—where the murdered child was found by hunters—and where the mother of poor Mungo hanged herself, were no imaginary matters. The poetry of Burns is full of truth.

"Tam O' Shanter" was received with all the applause to which it is richly entitled. "I have seldom

in my life," says Lord Woodhouselee, "tasted of higher enjoyment from any work of genius than I have received from this composition; and I am much mistaken if this poem alone, had you never written another syllable, would not have been sufficient to have transmitted your name down to posterity with high reputation." Of this "happiest of all mixtures of spirituality and practical life," as Sir Egerton Brydges calls the tale, the Poet was justly proud. He carried it in his pocket, and read it willingly to those in whose taste he had any trust. He read it to my father. His voice was deep, manly, and melodious, and his eye sparkled as he saw the effect of his poem on all around—young and old. A writer, who happened to be present on business, stung, perhaps, with that sarcastic touch on the brethren—

"Three lawyers' tongues turn'd inside out
With lies seam'd like a beggar's clout."

remarked, that he thought the language describing the witches' orgies obscure. "Obscure, sir!" said Burns, "ye know not the language of that great master of your own art—the devil. If you get a witch for a client, you will not be able to manage her defence!"

"The Whistle" is another poem of this happy season. The meeting, it seems, for deciding the ownership of the musical relique should have taken place sooner.—"Big with the idea," says Burns to Riddell, "of this important day (October 16, 1789) at Friars-Carse, I have watched the elements and skies, in the full persuasion that they would an-

nounce it to the astonished world by some phenomena of terrific portent. The elements, however, seem to take the matter very quietly; they did not even usher in this morning with triple suns and a shower of blood, symbolical of the three potent heroes and the mighty claret-shed of the day. For me, as Thomson, in his Winter, says of the storm, I shall

'Hear astonish'd, and astonish'd sing.'"

The story of the "Whistle" is curious:—A Dane came to Scotland with the Princess of Denmark, in the reign of our sixth James, and challenged all the topers of the north to a contest at the bottle. A Whistle of ebony was to be the prize of the day; this he had blown in triumph at the courts of Copenhagen, Stockholm, Moscow, and Warsaw, and was only prevented from doing the same at the Scottish court by Sir Robert Laurie of Maxwellton, who, after a contest of three days and three nights, left the Dane under the table,

"And blew on the whistle his requiem shrill."

On Friday, 16th October, 1790, the Whistle was again contended for in the same element by the descendants of the great Sir Robert:—

"Three joyous good fellows, with hearts clear of flaw:
Craigdarroch, so famous for wit, worth, and law;
And trusty Glenriddel, so skilled in old coins,
And gallant Sir Robert, deep read in old wines."

And that their deeds might not be inglorious, they chose an inspired chronicler to attend them:—

"A bard was selected to witness the fray,
And tell future ages the feats of the day;
A bard who detested all sadness and spleen,
And wish'd that Parnassus a vineyard had been."

This is is one of the most dramatic of lyrics: all is in character, and in the strictest propriety of sentiment and language. The contest took place at Friars-Carse, a place of great natural beauty; but the combatants closed the shutters against the loveliness of the landscape, either up the Nith or down, and lighting the dining-room, ordered the corks of the claret to be drawn. They had already swallowed six bottles a-piece, and day was breaking, when Ferguson decanting a quart of wine, dismissed it at a draught. Upon this Glenriddel, recollecting that he was an elder, and a ruling one in the kirk, and feeling he was waging an ungodly strife, meekly withdrew from the contest, and

"Left the foul business to folks less divine."

Though Sir Robert could not well contend both with fate and quart bumpers, he fought to the last, and fell not till the sun arose. Not so Ferguson, and not so Burns; the former sounded a note of triumph on his Whistle, while

"Up rose our bard, like a prophet in drink:—
'Craigdarroch, thou'lt soar when creation shall sink!
But if thou would flourish immortal in rhyme,
Come—one bottle more—and have at the sublime!'"

In truth, it is said that the Poet drank bottle for bottle in this arduous contest, and, when day-light came, seemed much disposed to take up the conqueror.

Though Burns had ten large parishes to look after as exciseman, and though the inclination of husbandmen for smuggling in those days kept him busy, his fields seemed as well cultivated, and his crops little less luxuriant, than those of his neigbours. But he felt

that his plough was held without profit, and his dairy managed without gain, and remained for weeks at a time at home, intent on other matters than

"Learning his tuneful trade from every bough."

How he demeaned himself as gauger, farmer, and poet has been related by an able and observant judge:—"I had an adventure with him," said Ramsay of Ochtertyre, "when passing through Dumfriesshire in 1790, with Dr. Stewart of Luss. Seeing him pass quickly near Closeburn, I said to my companion, 'that is Burns.' On coming to the inn (Brownhill), the ostler told us he would be back in a few hours to grant permits; that where he met with any thing seizable, he was no better than any other gauger: in every thing else he was a perfect gentleman. After leaving a note to be delivered to him on his return, I proceeded to his house, being curious to see his Jean, &c. I was much pleased with his *uxor Sabina qualis*, and the Poet's modest mansion, so unlike the habitation of ordinary peasants. In the evening, he suddenly bounced in upon us, and said as he entered, 'I come, to use the words of Shakspeare, stewed in haste.' In fact, he had ridden incredibly fast. We fell into conversation directly, and soon got into the *mare magnum* of poetry. He told me he had now gotten a story for a drama, which he was to call 'Rob Macquechan's Elshin,' from a popular story of Robert Bruce being defeated on the water of Cairn, when the heel of his boot being loosened in the flight, he applied to Rob to fix it, who, to make sure, ran his

awl nine inches up the king's heel. We were now going on at a great rate, when Mr. S—— popped in his head, which put a stop to our discourse, which had become very interesting. Yet in a little while it was resumed; and such was the force and versatility of the bard's genius, that he made the tears run down Mr. S.'s cheeks, albeit unused to the poetic strain." The Poet had imagined a drama commencing with the early vicissitudes of the fortunes of Bruce—recording his strange, his heroic, and sometimes laughable adventures, till all ended in the glorious consummation at Bannockburn. He allowed, as was his wont, the subject to float about in his mind, and drew out no plan or list of characters on paper.

We find Burns at this period informing Graham of Fintray that the excise business went on much smoother with him than he had expected, owing to the generous friendship of Mitchell the collector, and Findlater the supervisor.—" I dare to be honest," said he, " and I fear no labour. Nor do I find my hurried life greatly inimical to my correspondence with the muses; I meet them now and then as I jog among the hills of Nithsdale, just as I used to do on the banks of Ayr." Of the lyrical fruit of this intercourse, I must render some account.

In the composition of a song, Burns went to work like a painter: what a fine living model is to an artist forming a Venus or a Diana, a lovely woman was to the Poet. He was fascinated through the eye; he thought of the looks of the last fair one he had met, and mused on her charms till the proper

inspiration came; and then he laid out colours worthy of a goddess, on

"Fair or foul, it maks na whether."

Jean Lorimer, "The lass of Craigie-burn-wood," had levity at least equal to her beauty. When the first song in her praise was written she lived at Kemmis-hall in Nithsdale; she was extremely handsome, with uncommon sweetness in her smile, and joyousness in the glance of her eye. The Poet measured his verse over her charms to gratify a gentleman of the name of Gillespie, who was contending in vain with a military adventurer of the name of Whelpdale for the honour of her love. In "My tocher's the jewel," he expresses the scorn which a young lady feels at the selfish sentiments of her lover:—

"It's a' for the apple he'll nourish the tree;
It's a' for the hinney he'll cherish the bee:
My laddie's sae mickle in love with the siller,
He canna have love to spare for me."

From love he went to wine; nothing came wrong to him. In this his poetic powers resembled his conversational ability. "Gudewife, count the lawin" is the very essence of sociality and glee:—

"Gane is the day, and mirks the night,
But we'll ne'er stray for faut o' light;
For ale and brandy's stars and moon,
And blude-red wine's the rising sun."

A little jacobitism was in his heart when he wrote "There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame;" a little humour when he penned "What can a young lassie do wi' an auld man?" and in "Yon wild mossy mountains" his mind wandered back to a

part of his early history, which he says "is of no consequence to the world to know."

In a happier mood of mind Burns composed "Wha is that at my bower-door?"—"It was suggested," said Gilbert, "to my brother, by the Auld man's address to the widow, printed in Ramsay's Tea-table Miscellany." A vein of pawkie simplicity runs through it:—

"Wha is that at my bower-door?
O wha is it but Findlay!
Then gae yere gate, ye'se no be here—
Indeed maun I, quo' Findlay.

What mak' ye sae like a thief?
O come and see, quo' Findlay.
Before the morn ye'll work mischief—
Indeed will I, quo' Findlay.

Here this night, if ye remain—
I'll remain, quo' Findlay.
I dread ye'll ken the gate again—
Indeed will I, quo' Findlay."

"'The bonnie wee thing' was composed," says the Poet, "on my little idol, the charming lovely Davies." In a letter to the lady herself, he lets us a little into the mystery of his ballad-making:—"I have heard of a gentleman of some genius who was dexterous with his pencil; wherever this person met with a character in a more than ordinary degree congenial to his heart, he used to steal a sketch of the face, merely, he said, as a nota-bene to point out the agreeable recollection to his memory. What this gentleman's pencil was to him, is my muse to me; and the verses which I do myself the honour to send you are a memento exactly of the same kind that he indulged in. When I meet with a person after my own heart, I positively feel what an orthodox Protestant would call a species of idolatry, which acts

on my fancy like inspiration; and I can no more resist rhyming on the impulse, than an Æolian harp can refuse its tones to the streaming air." No poet has offered prettier reasons for writing love-songs.

These complimental moods gave way to a feeling more serious, when the Poet wrote "Ae fond kiss, and then we sever." The song I have heard alludes to Clarinda, and is supposed to embody the sentiments of the Bard when he bade farewell to that Edinburgh beauty. It says all in a few words that can be said on the subject:—

"Who shall say that fortune grieves him,
While the star of hope she leaves him?
Me—no cheerful twinkle lights me;
Dark despair around benights me.
Had we never loved so kindly,
Had we never loved so blindly,
Never met, or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken hearted."

Of the heroine of the "Banks and braes o' bonnie Doon," I can give no account; the song was altered from its original simple measure to suit music, accidentally composed by a writer in Edinburgh, whom a musician told to keep to the black keys of the harpsichord and preserve something like rhythm, and he would produce a Scots air. He did so, and this fine air, with a few touches from Clarke, was the result. The despair of "Ae fond kiss and then we sever," gave way to the gentler sorrows of the "Banks and braes o' bonnie Doon;" and, in its turn, "Love will venture in" asserted the dignity of successful love. This is a very beautiful lyric; the Poet thinks on his mistress, and looking at all manner of fine flowers, sees her, emblematically, in each:

the lily, for purity; the daisy, for simplicity; and the violet, for modesty, are woven into this fragrant and characteristic chaplet.

Having obeyed the impulses of sorrow and serious love, mirth touched the strings of his harp, his heart brightened up, and he poured out, "O! for ane-and-twenty, Tam." The name of the heroine is lost; but her story is true to nature, and cannot be soon forgotten: there is a dance of words in the song suitable to the liveliness of the sentiment. "Sic a wife as Willie had," resembles the ironical and sarcastic chaunts of the old rustic ballad-makers: the picture of "Willie's Spouse," is not painted in kindly colours:

"She has an ee—she has but ane,
The cat has twa the very colour,
Five rusty teeth forbye a stump,
A clapper tongue wad deave a miller;
A whisking beard about her mou',
Her nose and chin they threaten ither:
Sic a wife as Willie had
I wad nae gie a bodle for her."

This unsonsie dame dwelt in Dunscore, at no great distance from Ellisland; her descendants have none of her unlovesome qualities.

If Burns looked to living loveliness for the sake of making new songs, he looked also with affectionate eyes on the old mutilated lyrics of Scotland, and repaired them with unequalled skill. To the ballad of "Hughie Graham," he added some characteristic touches, as also to "Cock up your Beaver." Into the latter he has infused a jacobite feeling:—

'Cock up your beaver, and cock it fu' sprush,
We'll over the Border and gie them a brush;

There's somebody there we'll teach better behaviour;
Hey! my brave Johnnie lad, cock up your beaver."

He softened a little the rudeness of "Eppie Macnab," added bitterness to "The weary pound o' tow;" some of his fine feeling found its way into "The Collier laddie," and much acid irony was infused into "The carle of Kellyburn-braes."—Cromek informed me, that when he consulted Mrs. Burns respecting the changes which the genius of her husband had effected in the old songs, she ran her finger along the pages of the Museum, saying, "Robert gave that one a brushing—this one got a brushing, too:—aye, I mind this one weel, it got a gay good brushing!"—But when she came to "The carle of Kellyburn-braes," she said, "He gave this one a terrible brushing." Of these dread additions one specimen will suffice:—

"The devil he swore by the edge of his knife,
He pitied the man that was tied to a wife;
The devil he swore by the kirk and the bell,
He was not in wedlock, thank heav'n, but in hell."

The winter-time, which brings much leisure to the farmer, brought little or none to Burns. When he saw his corn secured against rain and snow; his

"Potatoe bings weel snuggit up frae skaith;"

his plough frozen in the half-drawn furrow, and heard the "curler's roaring play" intimating that winter reigned over the vale, he had to mount his horse and do duty as a gauger, leaving Ellisland to the skill of his wife and the activity of his servants. As early as the harvest of 1790, it was visible to those acquainted with such matters, that, as a farmer, the Poet was not thriving; the crop promised, in

the eyes of the calculating, to make but a small return, compared with the demand of the rent; and, when he ploughed his ground in the following winter and spring, it was whispered that he would do so no more. He regretted this the less as he now looked upon the Excise as sure bread, and an improving appointment. Some time during the year 1791, his salary was raised to seventy pounds, and he was promised a more compact and less laborious district. This eased his mind amid the loss which he knew he should sustain, in turning the utensils and stock of Ellisland into money. He did not communicate his intentions to any one, though he hesitated not to say that he was losing by his bargain.

This year he was doomed to lose old friends without acquiring new ones. The death of the Earl of Glencairn he regarded as a sore misfortune. That nobleman was not rich, nor was his influence great; but he had a sympathy with poetic feelings not common to men of rank. When he died, the hopes of the Poet seem to have died also; his "Lament," on the occasion, was a sincere one; the words require only to be uttered by a young Bard instead of an old one, to apply, in all respects, to himself. The verse is lyrical, and the sentiments those of nature:—

"The bridegroom may forget the bride
  Was made his wedded wife yestreen;
The monarch may forget the crown
  That on his head an hour has been;
The mother may forget the child
  That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
  And all that thou hast done for me."

This is the language of a man who thought him-

self obliged. He wrote nothing half so tender or so touching on the death of the beautiful Miss Burnet, which happened about this time; he tried, but the words came with reluctance:—

"Life ne'er exulted in so rich a prize
As Burnet, lovely from her native skies;
Nor envious death so triumphed in a blow
As that which laid the accomplish'd Burnet low."

Some will like better the compliment which he paid her in prose. On returning from a first visit to Lord Monboddo, his friend Mr. Geddes said, "Well, and did you admire the young lady?"—"I admired God Almighty more than ever," said the Poet; "Miss Burnet is the most heavenly of all his works!" He did not hesitate to use expressions bordering on profanity when speaking of female charms.

In addition to the sorrow which he felt for the loss of valuable friends, his horse fell with him and broke his arm; and his farm having swept away all his ready money, visions of poverty began to hover in his sight. "Poverty," he exclaimed, "thou half-sister of Death—thou cousin-german of hell! oppressed by thee the son of genius, whose ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see, in suffering silence, his remarks neglected and his person despised; while shallow greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause." In such sarcastic sentiments as these, Burns began more and more to indulge:—"How wretched is the man," he says, "that hangs upon the favours of the great!—to shrink from every dignity of man at the approach of a lordly piece of self-consequence, who, amid all his tinsel

and glitter, and stately hauteur, is but a creature formed as thou art—and, perhaps, not so well formed."

He could scarcely resist, however, the request of one of the vainest of those "lordly pieces of self-consequence," the Earl of Buchan—to come to the coronation of the bust of Thomson on Ednam-hill, at Dryburgh, on the 22nd of September, 1791.—"Suppose Mr. Burns," thus runs the mandate, "should, leaving the Nith, go across the country, and meet the Tweed at the nearest point from his farm, and wandering along the pastoral banks of Thomson's pure parent-stream, catch inspiration in the devious walk, till he finds Lord Buchan sitting on the ruins of Dryburgh; there the Commendator will give him a hearty welcome, and try to light his lamp at the pure flame of native genius, upon the altar of Caledonian virtue." The Poet had the sickle in his hand when the invitation came; he laid it down, took a walk along the bank of the Nith, composed the verses "To the Shade of Thomson," and sent them to apologize for his absence.

If his poetic feelings were awakened by the invitation of Lord Buchan, his jacobitical partialities were gratified by the present of a valuable snuff-box from Lady Winifred Maxwell Constable, the last in direct descent of the noble family of Nithsdale. This was an acknowledgment for his "Lament of Mary Queen of Scots." There was a picture of that ill-starred princess on the lid.—"In the moment of poetic composition," said Burns, "the box shall be my inspiring genius."—The ballad is a pathetic one.

He imagines the queen in an English prison; she hears the birds sing---feels the odour of flowers, and her heart swells with the season :—

" Now blooms the lily by the bank,
The primrose down the brae;
The hawthorn's budding in the glen,
And milk-white is the slae:
The meanest hind in fair Scotland
May rove their sweets amang;
But I, the queen of a' Scotland,
Maun lie in prison strang."

He had been reading Percy's ballads, and his verses caught the olden hue and tone of those affecting compositions.

The great Glasgow road ran through the Poet's ground, and the coach often set down west-country passengers, who, trusting to the airt they came from, and the accessibility of the bard, made their sometimes unwelcome appearance at the door of Ellisland. Such visitations—from which no man of genius is free—consumed his time and wasted his substance—for hungry friends could not be entertained on air. A neighbour told me that he once found a couple of Ayrshire travellers, plaided, capped, and over-alled, seated at the door of Burns—their sense of etiquette not allowing them to enter the house in such trim. They were drinking punch, toasting Ayr—auld town and new, vowing that Mauchline was the loveliest of all spots, and Kyle the heart of Scotland. They found their way into Dumfries some time during the night.

In the summer of 1791, two English gentlemen who had met Burns in Edinburgh, paid him a visit at Ellisland. On calling at the house, they were

told he had walked out on the banks of the Nith. They proceeded in search of him, and found him—

"In sooth it was in strange array."

On a rock that projected into the stream they saw a man angling; he had a cap of fox-skin on his head, a loose great-coat fixed round him by a belt, from which hung an enormous Highland broad-sword;—it was Burns. He received them with great cordiality, and asked them to share his humble dinner. On the table they found boiled beef, with vegetables, and barley-broth, of which they partook heartily. After dinner, the bard told them he had no wine to offer, nothing better than Highland whiskey, of which Mrs. Burns set a bottle on the table, and placed his punch-bowl of Scottish marble before him. He mixed the spirit with water and sugar, filled their glasses, and invited them to drink. They were in haste—whiskey, to their southron stomachs, was scarcely tolerable; but the ardent hospitality of the Poet prevailed—the punch began to disappear, and his conversation was unto them as a charm. He ranged over a great variety of topics, illuminating whatever he touched. He related the tales of his infancy and of his youth; he recited some of the gayest and some of the tenderest of his poems; in the wildest of his strains of mirth he threw in some touches of melancholy, and spread around him the electric emotions of his powerful mind. The Highland whiskey improved in its flavour; the marble bowl was again and again emptied and replenished; the Poet's guests forgot the flight of time; and the prudence-becoming visi-

tors, at the hour of midnight, lost their way returning to Dumfries, and could scarcely count its three steeples assisted by the morning dawn.

Burns still maintained his intercourse with the literati of Scotland. He visited Edinburgh, and arranged his affairs with the difficult Creech ; called on some of his former intimates, and left his card at the doors of several lords ; but his reception seems, save from one or two, to have been uncordial. What the learned thought of the grasp of the Poet's mind, may be gathered from the surprise which one of them expresses at his comprehending the meaning of Alison's work on the principles of taste :—" I own, sir," said the Poet to the philosopher, " that at first glance several of your propositions startled me as paradoxical. That the martial clangour of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime than the twingle-twangle of a jew's-harp ; that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of a burdock, and that from something innate and independent of all association of ideas. These I had set down as irrefragable orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith."—" This," says Dugald Stewart, " I remember to have read with some degree of surprise at the distinct conception he appeared from it to have formed of the general principles of the law of association." It would seem, however, that the Poet, if convinced, was convinced against his will : he was slow in believing that at

any time a burdock was esteemed equal in loveliness to a rose, or the chirp of a hedge-sparrow reckoned as noble as the cry of an eagle.

"As to my private concerns," he says to Dr. Moore, "I am going on a mighty tax-gatherer before the Lord, and have lately had the interest to get myself ranked on the lists of the Excise as a supervisor. I had an immense loss in the death of the Earl of Glencairn, the patron from whom all my fame and good fortune took its rise; independent of my grateful attachment to him, which was indeed so strong that it pervaded my very soul, and was entwined with the thread of my existence. So soon as the prince's friends had got in, my getting forward in the Excise would have been an easier business than otherwise it will be." In these modest hopes the Poet indulged. He had already numbered himself with "the prince's friends;" but the prince was far from power; and had Burns lived till "the dog had," as he said, "got his day," he might have found reason to say with scripture, "put not your trust in princes."

If his poems of this year are not numerous, the "Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson" is one of the sweetest and most beautiful of his latter compositions. He calls on nature, animate and inanimate, to lament the loss of one who held his honours immediately from God:—

"Mourn, ye wee songsters of the wood;
Ye grouse that crap the heather-bud;
Ye curlews calling thro' a clud;
Ye whistling plover:
And mourn, ye whirring paitrick brood—
He's gane for ever!"

He copied out the poem, and sending it to his friend, M'Murdo, said, "You knew Henderson; I have not flattered his memory."

Burns wrote several new songs, and amended some old ones, during this season, for his friend Johnson's work. "Afton water" was an offering of other days to the accomplished lady of Afton-Lodge. "Bonnie Bell" is in honour of the charms of a Nithsdale dame, and "The deuk's dang o'er my daddie" had its origin in an old chaunt, some of the words of which the song still retains. "She's fair and fause" records the unfortunate termination of a friend's courtship; there is all or more than the bitterness of disappointed love in the concluding verse:—

"Whoe'er ye be that woman love,
To this be never blind,
Nae ferlie 'tis, tho' fickle she prove,
A woman has't by kind.
O woman! lovely woman fair,
An angel form's faun to thy share,
'Twad been o'er mickle to gi'en thee mair—
I mean an angel mind."

"The Deil's awa' wi' the Exciseman," is at once witty and ludicrous. It harmonized with the feelings of the north, where a gauger was long looked on as a national grievance, or rather insult. "The Song of Death" is the last lyric which the rural walks of Ellisland inspired. On the 17th of December, 1791, he copied it for Mrs. Dunlop, and said,—"I have just finished the following song, which, to a lady, the descendant of Wallace, and herself the mother of several soldiers, needs neither preface nor apology." He imagines a field of battle,

and puts his truly heroic song into the mouths of men wounded and dying; the sentiments uttered were those of his heart :—

" In the field of proud honour, our swords in our hands,
Our king and our country to save,
While victory shines on life's last ebbing sands—
O, who would not die with the brave!"

"This hymn," says Currie, "is worthy of the Grecian muse, when Greece was most conspicuous for genius and valour." Burns thought of printing it separately with the air, which is a fine old Highland one; some one whom he consulted, advised him against this, and so prevented him from making his country acquainted with his unaltered feelings, at a time when his character was beginning to be maligned by the secret whisperer and the pensioned spy.

Burns briefly, in his letters to his brother and others, intimates the loss he endured by continuing in Ellisland; but he has no where assigned reasons or entered into explanations. This has been misinterpreted to his injury. He alludes to his own trials, when, in 1792, he says to Mrs. Dunlop :—" I wish the farmer joy of his new acquisition to his family: I cannot say that I give him joy of his life as a farmer. 'Tis as a farmer paying a dear, unconscionable rent, 'a cursed life.' As to a laird farming his own property, sowing his own corn in hope, and reaping it in spite of brittle weather, in gladness, knowing that none can say unto him, 'What dost thou?' fattening his herds, shearing his flocks, rejoicing at Christmas, and begetting sons and daughters, until he be the venerated grey-haired leader of a little tribe—'tis 'a heavenly life!'

but devil take the life of reaping the fruits that another must eat!"

When it was made known in December, 1791, that Burns was about to relinquish the lease of Ellisland, his merits as a farmer were eagerly canvassed by the husbandmen around. One imputed his failure to the duties of the Excise; to his being condemned to gallop two hundred miles per week, to inspect yeasty barrels, when his farm required his presence; another said that Mrs. Burns was intimate with a town life, but ignorant of the labours of barn and byre; a third observed that Ellisland was out of heart, and, in short, was the dearest farm on Nithsdale; while James Currie, a sagacious farmer, whose land lay contiguous, remarked, when I inquired the cause of the Poet's failure:—"Fail! how could he miss but fail, when his servants ate the bread as fast as it was baked, and drank the ale as fast as it was brewed. Consider a little: at that time close economy was necessary to enable a farmer to clear twenty pounds a year by Ellisland. Now, Burns' handy-work was out of the question: he neither ploughed, nor sowed, nor reaped like a hard-working farmer; and then he had a bevy of idle servants from Ayrshire. The lasses were ay baking bread, and the lads ay lying about the fireside eating it warm with ale. Waste of time and consumption of food would soon reach to twenty pounds a year."

Had Mr. Millar of Dalswinton been on the same friendly terms with the Poet as when, in a fit of generous feeling, he offered him the choice of his farms at a rent of his own fixing, Burns might

have lived long, and, perhaps, prosperously in Ellisland. But they were too haughty in their natures to continue friends; •Millar required respect and submission, which the Poet was not disposed to pay; and I have heard it averred by one who was in a situation to know, that the former was not loth to get rid of a tenant by whose industry he had no chance of being enriched, from whom he could not well exact rent, and whose wit paid little respect to persons. The Poet dispersed his stock and implements by auction, among many eager purchasers; restored the land and onstead to the proprietor; and, paying him one pound fourteen shillings for dilapidations in thatch, glass, and slating, moved off with his household to Dumfries, leaving nothing at Ellisland but a putting-stone, with which he loved to exercise his strength—a memory of his musings which can never die, and three hundred pounds of his money sunk beyond redemption, in a speculation from which all augured happiness.

PART IV:—DUMFRIES.

Burns removed his wife and children, with his humble furniture, to a house near the lower end of the Bank-Vennel in Dumfries. The neighbourhood was to his mind; and as this was near the stamp-office, it is probable that John Syme, the " Stamp-

office Johnnie," of the Poet's election ballad, influenced his choice. He had other neighbours whom he could not but esteem: Captain Hamilton lived on the opposite side of the way; Provost Staig, with whose family Burns was already intimate, was but a few doors off, while Dr. Maxwell, a skilful physician, an accomplished gentleman, and a confirmed republican, dwelt in the next street. The Sands, where cattle are bought and sold, was beside him, the Nith was within a good stone's cast—the town, too, is compact and beautiful.

The Poet had no expensive acquaintance to entertain; and his wife, with a single servant, was frugal, and anxious to make the little they had go far. But he had no longer the rough abundance of a farm to resort to; his meal, his malt, his butter, and his milk, were all to buy, and his small salary required the guidance of a considerate head and hand. To calculate was easy, had it been possible to lay down an exact system of expenditure: as a man of genius, he was liable to the outlay of correspondence, distant and often unexpected; he was exposed to the inroads of friends and admirers, who consumed his time and his substance also; he longed for knowledge, which, to obtain, he had to buy; he desired to see by books what the republic of literature, of which he was a member, was about, and this required money; and he was, moreover, of a nature kindly and hospitable, and could not live in that state of frugal circumspection, which a gentleman who kept a house and a horse on seventy pounds per annum, required.

Even the wandering poor were to the Poet a heavy tax; he allowed no one to go past his door without a halfpenny or a handful of meal. He was kind to such helpless creatures as are weak in mind, and saunter harmlessly about: a poor half-mad creature—the Madge Wildfire, it is said, of Scott—always found a mouthful ready for her at the bard's fire-side; nor was he unkind to a crazy and tippling prodigal named Quin.—"Jamie," said the Poet one day as he gave him a penny, "you should pray to be turned from the evil of your ways; you are ready to run now to melt that into whiskey."—"Turn," said Jamie, who was a wit in his way, "I wish some one would turn me into the worm o' Will Hyslop's whiskey-still, that the drink might rin continually through me."—"Well said, Jamie!" answered the Poet, "you shall have a glass of whiskey once a week for that, if you'll come sober for it." A friend rallied Burns for indulging such creatures:—"You don't understand the matter," said he, "they are poets; they have the madness of the muse, and all they want is the inspiration—a mere trifle!"

The labours of the Excise led him along a barren line of sea-coast, extending from Caerlaverock-castle, where the Maxwells dwelt of old, to Annan water. This district fronts the coast of England; and from its vicinity to the Isle of Man, was in those days infested with daring smugglers, who poured in brandy, Holland-gin, tea, tobacco, and salt, in vast quantities. Small farmers, and persons engaged in inland traffic, diffused these commodities through the villages; these were generally vigorous and

daring fellows, in whose hearts a gauger or two bred no dismay. They were well mounted, acquainted with the use of a cutlass, an oak-sapling, or a whip loaded with lead ; and when mounted between a couple of brandy-kegs, and their horses' heads turned to the hills, not one Exciseman in ten dared to stop them. To prevent the disembarkation of run-goods, when a smuggling craft made its appearance, was the duty of the Poet ; and many a darksome hour he was compelled to keep watch, that the peasantry might not have the pleasure of drinking tea or brandy duty free. There was something which suited his fancy in all this. He had, galloping from point to point—much excitement of mind, and hopes of golden booty, but not without blows.

In whatever adventure he was engaged, "Still his speech was song." Mounted on the successor of Jenny Geddes, whose mortal career closed at Ellisland, he "muttered his wayward fancies as he roved," and sang the beauty of the maidens of the land, and the pastoral charms of the country. It was in one of his expeditions against the smugglers that he wrote the brief but exquisite lyric, "Louis what reck I by thee ?" To say much in a few words is one of the characteristics of his verse :—

> "Louis, what reck I
> Or Geordie on
> Dyvor, beggar lo
> I reign in Jeanie

"Out over the Forth" is another of his short and lucky compositions. "The carding o't" belongs to

the same class; nothing in all the compass of lyric verse is more truly natural:—

> "I coft a stane o' haslock woo
> To make a coat to Johnie o't;
> For Johnie is my only jo,
> I loe him best of ony yet.
> For though his locks be lyart gray,
> And though his brow be beld aboon,
> Yet I hae seen him on a day
> The pride of a' the parishen."

One day, during the month of August, he was surprised by a visit from Miss Lesley Baillie, a beauty of the west of Scotland.—"On which," said Burns to Mrs. Dunlop, "I took my horse, though God knows I could ill spare the time, accompanied her father and her fourteen or fifteen miles, and dined and spent the day with them. 'Twas about nine, I think, when I left them, and riding home, I composed the following ballad." Some of the verses of this song are in his best manner:—

> "To see her is to love her,
> And love but her for ever;
> For nature made her what she is,
> And never made anither.
> The deil he couldna skaith thee,
> Nor aught that wad belang thee;
> He'd look into thy bonny face,
> And say, 'I canna wrang thee.'"

Most of the songs which I have hitherto noticed were written for the Museum of Johnson. A candidate of higher pretence now made his appearance; this was Thomson.—"I have," said he in a letter to Burns, "employed many leisure hours in selecting and collecting the best of our national melodies for publication. I have engaged Pleyel, the most agreeable composer living, to put accompaniments to

these, and also to compose an instrumental prelude and conclusion to each air. To render this work perfect, I am desirous of having the poetry improved, wherever it seems unworthy of the music ; and that it is so, in many instances, is allowed by every one conversant with our musical collections. To remove this reproach would be an easy task to the author of 'the Cottar's Saturday Night,' and for the honour of Caledonia I would fain hope he may be induced to take up the pen."

An application such as this appealed to too many associations for Burns to resist ; he replied with something like the enthusiasm of a lover when his mistress asks a favour, "As the request you make," said the Poet, September 16, 1792, "will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have strained to their utmost execution by the impulse of enthusiasm. If you are for English verses, there is, on my part, an end of the matter. Whether in the simplicity of the ballad or the pathos of the song, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed, at least, a sprinkling of our native tongue. As to any remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price, for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, would be downright prostitution of soul."

To stipulations such as these Thomson could have no objections to offer ; he was glad to get the Bard on his own romantic terms. The first fruits of the

bargain was "The Lea Rig." Though a beautiful song, it seems not to have been to the satisfaction of the Poet. "I tried my hand on the air," he says, "and could make nothing more of it than the verses which I enclose. Heaven knows they are poor enough! All my earlier songs are the breathings of ardent passion; and though it might have been easy, in after times, to have given them a polish, yet that polish would have defaced the legend of my heart which is so faithfully inscribed on them."

"Highland Mary" followed this. The lyrical flow of the verse, and the truth and pathos of the sentiments, make it a favourite with all who have voices or feelings. "I think," says the Poet, "the song is in my happiest manner; it refers to one of the most interesting passages in my youthful days: and I own I should be much flattered to see the verses set to an air, which would ensure celebrity. Perhaps, after all, 'tis the still glowing prejudice of my heart that throws a borrowed lustre over the merits of the composition."—He makes inanimate nature a sharer in his rapture:—

"How sweetly bloomed the gay green birk!
  How rich the hawthorn's blossom!
As underneath their fragrant shade
  I clasped her to my bosom!
The golden hours, on angel wings,
  Flew o'er me and my dearie;
For dear to me as light and life
  Was my sweet Highland Mary."

This exquisite lyric proves how much the passionate affections of his youth still moved him. He was ready, when Mary's image rose on his fancy, to pour out his feelings in song; he was more than

usually inspired whenever he thought of her. The thorn, under whose shade the lovers sat, is still pointed out and held sacred by the peasantry.

The season of winter was propitious to the muse of Burns; there was something of old habit in this: the long evenings bring leisure to the farmer, and the farmer was still strong in him. "Auld Rob Morris" was written in November; the idea is taken from an earlier song, but the Burns-spirit soon gained the ascendant; he has painted the portrait of his heroine in similes:—

"She's fresh as the morning the fairest in May;
She's sweet as the evening amang the new hay;
As blythe and as artless as lambs on the lea,
And dear to my heart as the light to my ee."

"Duncan Gray" came to the world in December; had he come in summer he could not have been more "a lad of grace;" he went a wooing in a pleasant time, on gude Yule night, when all were joyous—but

"Maggie coost her head fu' hiegh,
Looked asklent and unco skeigh,
Gart poor Duncan stand abiegh."

He was not however to be daunted with this; he knew woman better:—

"Duncan fleeched and Duncan prayed,
Meg was deaf as Ailsa craig;
Duncan sighed baith out and in;
Grat his een baith bleer'd and blin;
Spak o' lowpin owre a linn!"

She relented.—"Duncan Gray," said the Poet, "is a light horse-gallop of an air which precludes sentiment—the ludicrous is its ruling feature."

"O! poortith, cauld and restless love," is a song full of other feelings: the heroine is said to be Jean

Lorimer, the lass of Craigie-burn-wood: and this is countenanced by the sentiment of one impassioned verse:—

> " Her een sae bonnie blue betray
>   How she repays my passion,
> But prudence is her o'erword ay
>   She talks of rank and fashion.
> O wha can prudence think upon,
>   And sic a lassie by him?
> O wha can prudence think upon,
>   And sae in love as I am?"

A being of a more celestial nature inspired that magnificent lyric, "The Vision." The ruined college of Lincluden, which stands among antique trees on a beautiful plat of rising ground, where the Cluden unites with the Nith, a little above Dumfries, was a favourite haunt of the Poet, as it is of all lovers of landscape beauty. On a moonlight evening he imagined himself musing alone among the splendid ruins: the dust of a Scottish princess and the bones of one of the intrepid Douglasses brought recollections of ancient independence to his mind, while the quiet and beautiful scenery around awakened inspiration. For liquid ease of language and heroic grandeur of conception "The Vision" is unequalled; the commencing verse prepares us for the coming of something more than human:—

> " As I stood by yon roofless tower,
>   Where the wa' flower scents the dewy air,
> Where the howlet mourns in her ivy bower,
>   And tells the midnight moon her care—
> The winds were laid, the air was still,
>   The stars they shot along the sky,
> The fox was howling on the hill,
>   And distant echoing glens reply."

While enjoying the scene, and looking on the

northern streamers, the Vision of Liberty descended or arose before him; not the blood-stained nymph of that name beloved by the Jacobin Club, but a Liberty of Scottish extraction, stern and stalwart, of the rougher sex, attired like an ancient minstrel, carrying a harp, and wearing the cognizance of freedom. The majestic apparition touched his harp and chaunted a strain which spoke of former joys and present sorrows, in language which the Poet durst only describe. This fine lyric was intended, with some modifications, to be wrought into the drama of "The Bruce," a subject never wholly out of the Bard's fancy.

From musing on woman's love and man's freedom, Burns was rudely awakened. An inquiry regarding the sentiments which he entertained and the language in which he had indulged concerning "Thrones and Dominations" was directed to be made by the Commissioners of Excise, pursuant to instructions it is said received from high quarters. It will probably never be known who the pestilent informer against the Poet was; some contemptible wretch who had suffered from his wit or who envied his fame gave the information on which the Board of Excise acted, and he was subjected to a sort of inquisition. The times, indeed, in which he lived were perilous, and government found it no easy thing to rule or tranquillize the agitated passions of the people. A new light had arisen on the nations: freedom burst out like a summer sun in France; monarchy was trampled under foot; democracy arose in its place; equality in all, save intellect, was preached up, and

the true order of nature was to be restored to the delighted world.

This doctrine was welcomed widely in Scotland; it resembled, in no small degree, the constitution of the Calvinistic kirk, which is expressly democratic; and it accorded with the sentiments which education and knowledge awaken—for who is so blind as not to see that idols, dull and gross, occupy some of the highplaces which belong to genius as a birthright? It corresponded wondrously too, with the notions of Burns: it harmonized with the plan which he perceived in nature, and was in strict keeping with his sentiments of free-will and independence.—"He was disposed," says Professor Walker, "from constitutional temper, from education, and from the accidents of life, to a jealousy of power, and a keen hostility against every system which enabled birth and opulence to intercept those rewards which he conceived to belong to genius and virtue." That he desired to see true genius honoured, and wealthy presumption checked; that he wished to take his place on the table-land among peers and princes, and obtain station and importance—to adorn which his high powers, he believed, were given—were desires natural to a gifted mind; and it could not be but galling for him to see men who had not a tithe of his talent rolling in luxury, while he was doomed to poverty and dependence. That these sentiments were in the heart or Burns I know; that he ever sought to give them full utterance, or entertained them farther than as theories grateful to his mind, it would be difficult to find proof.

From these charges Burns strove to defend himself: he addressed his steady friend Graham, of Fintray, on the subject; the letter is dated December, 1792.—"I have been surprised, confounded and distracted by Mr. Mitchell, the collector, telling me that he has received an order from your Board to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to government. Sir, you are a husband and a father. You know what you would feel to see the much-loved wife of your bosom and your helpless prattling little ones turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced, from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected. I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not though even worse horrors—if worse can be than those I have mentioned—hung over my head; and I say that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie! To the British Constitution, on revolution principles, next, after my God, I am most devoutly attached. Fortune, sir, has made you powerful and me impotent—has given you patronage and me dependence. I would not, for my single self, call on your humanity; I could brave misfortune—I could face ruin—for, at the worst, 'Death's thousand doors stand open;' but the tender concerns which I have mentioned—the claims and ties which I see at this moment, and feel around me—how they unnerve courage and wither resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due. To these, sir, permit me to appeal; by these may I adjure you to

save me from that misery which threatens to overwhelm me; and which, with my latest breath I will say it, I have not deserved?"

These are the words of his private letter: it enclosed another, intended for the eye of the commissioners, and which was laid before the Board. In the second epistle, Burns disclaimed all idea of setting up a republic, and declared that he stood by the constitutional principles of the revolution of 1688: at the same time he felt that corruptions had crept in, which every patriotic Briton desired to see amended.—"This last remark," says the Poet, in his celebrated letter to John Francis Erskine, afterwards Earl of Mar, gave great offence; and, one of our supervisors-general, a Mr. Corbet, was instructed to inquire on the spot, and to document me—'That my business was to act, *not to think;* and that whatever might be, men or measures, it was for me to be *silent* and *obedient.*' Mr. Corbet was my steady friend; so, between Mr. Graham and him, I have been partly forgiven, only I understand that all hopes of my getting officially forward are blasted."

These words were written by the Poet, April 13, 1793; and yet Mr. Findlater, then his superior officer, says, "I may venture to assert, that when Burns was accused of a leaning to democracy, and an inquiry into his conduct took place, he was subjected, in consequence thereof, to no more than perhaps a private or verbal caution, to be more circumspect in future. Neither do I believe his promotion was thereby affected as has been stated." Burns, I ap-

prehend, knew best how this was: an order to act, and not to think; and, whatever might be men and measures, to be silent and obedient, seems a sharp sort of private caution. That the records of the Excise-office, as some one assured Lockhart, exhibit no traces of this too memorable matter, is not to be wondered at: expulsions alone are entered—or, if the records say more, memoranda, so little to the honour of the commissioners, will neither be eagerly sought for, nor willingly found. That Burns never got forward is certain; that he ceased to speak of his hopes of advancement, is also true. What was the cause of this? That it did not arise from his want of skill or his inattention to his duties Findlater furnishes undeniable testimony, and other evidence can readily be found: nor was it because death slipt too early in and frustrated the desire of the Board to advance him, for he survived their insulting and crushing inquiry more than three years and a half. He survived, indeed, but he was no longer the bright and enthusiastic being who looked forward with eager hope; who ascended in fancy the difficult steeps of fame; and who set coteries in a roar of laughter, or moved them to tears.

Reasons for this harshness on the part of Government—for the Board of Excise was but the acting servant—have been anxiously sought, in the words and deeds of Burns.—"He stood," says Walker, "on a lofty eminence, surrounded by enemies as well as by friends, and no indiscretion which he committed was suffered to escape." His looks were watched; his words weighed; and wheresoever he

went the eyes of the malignant and the envious were on him. I have been told by one incapable of misleading me, that Burns sometimes made his appearance in a club of obscure individuals in Dumfries, where toasts were given, and songs sung which required closed doors. I have also been informed, that when invited to a private dinner, where the entertainer proposed " the health of William Pitt," the Poet said sharply, " Let us drink the health of a greater and better man—George Washington ;" and it is also true, that when Dumourier, the republican general, deserted the cause of his country, and joined her enemies, Burns rashly chaunted that short song, beginning

" You are welcome to despots, Dumourier."

Nay more, I have the proof before me that he wrote a scoffing ballad on the foreign sovereigns who united to crush French liberty ; but then all these matters happened after, not before he was " documented" by the Board of Excise. That he forgot now and then what was due to the dignity of his genius, is no new admission. The club which sung songs with closed doors, did so to hinder the landlady, not the landlord, to hear ; the dinner where he toasted Washington, and was sullen because it was not drunk, took place in 1793. In Midsummer the same year, Dumourier forsook the standard of his country, and was welcomed by despots ; and with regard to the ballad on the sovereigns, I am sure the gravest of them all would have laughed heartily at the vivid but indecorous wit of the composition.

A more serious indiscretion has been imputed to

him. Lockhart relates, that on the 27th of February, 1792, a smuggling brig entered the Solway, and Burns was one of the party of officers appointed to watch her motions. It was soon discovered that her crew were numerous, well armed, and likely to resist; upon which Lewars, a brother exciseman, galloped off to Dumfries, and Crawford, the superintendent, went to Ecclefechan for military assistance. Burns manifested much impatience at being left on a cold exposed beach, with a force unequal to cope with those to whom he was opposed, and exclaimed against the dilatory movements of Lewars, wishing the devil to take him. Some one advised him to write a song about it; on which the Poet, taking a few strides among the shells and pebbles, chaunted "The deil's awa' wi' the exciseman." The song was not well composed, when up came Lewars with his soldiers, on which Burns, putting himself at their head, his pistols in his pockets, and his sword in his hand, waded mid-waist deep into the sea, and carried the smuggler. She was armed. The Poet, whose conduct was much commended, purchased four of her brass guns, and sent them in a present to the French Directory. These, with the letter which accompanied them, were intercepted on their way to France. The suspicions of government were awakened by this breach of decorum, and men in power turned their eyes on the bard, and opened their ears to all his unguarded sayings. That the smuggler was captured chiefly by the bravery of Burns I have been often told; but I never heard it added that he purchased her guns and sent them to

the Directory. The biographer seems to have had his information from persons connected with the Excise; but I suspect the story is not more accurate than that, when accused of a leaning to democracy, "he was subjected to no more than perhaps a verbal or private caution to be more circumspect in future."

Burns felt humbled and hurt: he was degraded in his own eyes; he was pushed rudely down from his own little independent elevation, and treated like an imbecile, whose words and actions were to be regulated by the ungentle members of the Board of Excise.—"Have I not," he says to Erskine, "a more precious stake in my country's welfare than the richest dukedom in it? I have a large family of children, and the prospect of many more. I have three sons who I see already have brought into the world souls ill qualified to inhabit the bodies of slaves."

It is pleasing to escape with the Poet from the racks of the Board of Excise, and accompany him on his excursions along the banks of the Nith, where he soothed his spirit by composing songs for the publications of Thomson or Johnson. In January, 1793, he wrote "Lord Gregory;" in March, "Wandering Willie" and "Jessie," and in April, "The Poor and Honest Sodger." The first is borrowed in some measure from the exquisite old ballad of "The Lass of Lochroyan," the second is more original:—

"Loud blew the cauld winter winds at our parting;
It was na the blast brought the tear to my ee;
Now welcome the simmer, and welcome my Willie;
The simmer to nature—my Willie to me.'

The third was written in honour of the young and the lovely Jessie Staig of Dumfries; and the fourth was awakened by the prospect of coming war, which ended not till it laid many kingdoms desolate, and put the half of Britain into mourning. In the remarks of Thomson on his songs he was not always acquiescent.—"Give me leave," he says, "to criticise your taste in the only thing in which it is reprehensible. You know I ought to know something of my own trade; of pathos, sentiment, and point you are a complete judge; but there is a quality more necessary than either in a song, and which is the only essence of a ballad, I mean simplicity. Now, if I mistake not, this last feature you are apt to sacrifice to the foregoing." He was as anxious about the purity of Scottish music as about the simplicity of the verse. "One hint," he says to Thomson, "let me give you: whatever Pleyel does, let him not alter one iota of the original Scottish airs; let our national music preserve its native features. They are, I own, frequently wild and irreducible to the more modern rules, but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect."

The beauties whom Burns met on Nithside, inspired many of the sweetest of his songs: the daughters of his friend, John M'Murdo, were then very young; but they were also very lovely, and had all the elegance and simplicity which poets love. To Jean M'Murdo we owe the ballad of "Bonnie Jean." "I have some thought," he says to Thomson, "of inserting in your index, or in my notes, the names of the fair ones the themes of my songs. I do not mean the name at full, but dashes or asterisms, so

as ingenuity may find them out. The heroine of the foregoing is Miss M——, daughter of Mr. M—— of D——, one of your subscribers: I have not painted her in the rank which she holds in life, but in the dress and character of a cottager." He thought very well of this composition; he asks if the image in the following sweet verse is not original;—

> "As in the bosom of the stream
> The moonbeam dwells at dewy e'en;
> So trembling pure was faithful love
> Within the breast of bonnie Jean."

Her sister Phillis, a young lady equally beautiful and engaging, inspired the Poet also; though he imputes the verses in which he sings of her charms, to the entreaty of Clarke the musician. The first of these lyrics begins:—

> "While larks, with little wing,
> Fann'd the pure air,
> Tasting the breathing spring,
> Forth did I fare."

The other contains that fine verse:—

> "Her voice is the song of the morning,
> That wakes through the green spreading grove,
> When Phœbus peeps over the mountains
> On music, and pleasure, and love."

Ideal loveliness sometimes appeared to him in his solitary wanderings. Autumn he reckoned a propitious season for verse; he wrote thus to Thomson in the month of August:—"I rode out yestreen for a gloamin shot at the muses, when the muse that presides over the shores of Nith, or, rather, my old inspiring dearest nymph, Coila, whispered me the following: I have two reasons for thinking that it was my early sweet simple inspirer that was at my elbow, 'smooth gliding without step,' and pouring

the song on my glowing fancy. In the first place, since I left Coila's native haunts, not a fragment of a poet has arisen to cheer her solitary musings by catching inspiration from her; so I more than suspect she has followed me hither, or, at least, makes me occasional visits." The song which this celestial lady of the west awakened, commences thus:

> "Come let me take thee to my breast,
>   And pledge we ne'er shall sunder,
> And I shall spurn as vilest dust
>   The world's wealth and grandeur."

From lower sources other lyrics of this period are said to have sprung. To the winning looks of a young girl who "brewed gude ale for gentlemen," and was indulgent even to rakish customers, we owe the song of "The golden locks of Anna," of which there are several versions, and none quite decorous, though a clerical biographer of the Bard has said otherwise. A purer song, "The mirk night of December" had its origin in a similar quarter:—

> "O May! thy morn was ne'er so sweet,
>   As the mirk night of December,
> For sparkling was the rosy wine,
>   And private was the chamber,
> And dear was she I dare na name,
>   But I will ay remember."

Burns was as ready with his verse to solace the woes of others, as to give utterance to his own. "You, my dear sir," he says to Thomson, "will remember an unfortunate part of our worthy friend Cunningham's story, which happened about three years ago. That struck my fancy, and I endeavoured to do the idea justice as follows."—The song ex-

pressing the sentiments of his friend is that sublime one—

"Had I a cave on some wild distant shore."

The concluding verse, a lady told me, always made her shudder:—

"Falsest of womankind! canst thou declare
All thy fond plighted vows—fleeting as air?
To thy new lover hie,
Laugh o'er thy perjury;
Then in thy bosom try
What peace is there."

To the influence of thunder, lightning, and rain we owe, we are told, the heroic Address of Bruce at Bannockburn. I abridge the legend of John Syme, who accompanied the Poet on a tour in Galloway:—"I got Burns a grey Highland sheltie to ride on. We dined the first day, July 27, 1793, at Glendinning's, of Parton—a beautiful situation on the banks of the Dee. In the evening we walked out and viewed the Alpine scenery around; immediately opposite, we saw Airds, where dwelt Lowe, the author of Mary's Dream. This was classic ground for Burns; he viewed 'the highest hill which rises o'er the source of Dee,' and would have staid till the 'passing spirit' appeared, had we not resolved to reach Kenmore that night. We arrived as 'The Gordons' were sitting down to supper. Here is a genuine baron's seat; the castle, an old building, stands on a large natural moat, and in front the Ken winds for several miles through a fertile and beautiful holm. We spent three days with 'The Gordons,' whose hospitality is of a polished and endearing kind. We left Kenmore and went to Gatehouse. I took him the moor road,

where savage and desolate regions extended wide around. The sky was sympathetic with the wretchedness of the soil; it became lowering and dark—the winds sighed hollow—the lightnings gleamed—the thunders rolled. The Poet enjoyed the awful scene; he spoke not a word, but seemed rapt in meditation. In a little while the rain began to fall; it poured in floods upon us. For three hours did the wild elements rumble their bellyfull upon our defenceless heads. We got utterly wet; and to revenge ourselves, the Poet insisted, at Gatehouse, on our getting utterly drunk. I said that in the midst of the storm, on the wilds of Kenmore, Burns was rapt in meditation. What do you think he was about? He was charging the English army along with Bruce at Bannockburn. He was engaged in the same manner in our ride home from St. Mary's Isle, and I did not disturb him. Next day he produced me the Address of Bruce to his troops, and gave me a copy for Dalzell."

Concerning this far-famed ode, Burns says to Thomson,—"There is a tradition which I have met with in many places in Scotland, that the air of 'Hey, tuttie tattie,' was Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn. This thought, in my solitary wanderings, warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of Scottish ode, that one might suppose to be the royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning." In the same strain he addresses the Earl of Buchan, to whom he sent a copy of the song.—"Independent of

my enthusiasm as a Scotsman, I have rarely met with any thing in history which interests my feelings as a man equal to the story of Bannockburn. On the one hand, a cruel usurper leading on the finest army in Europe to extinguish the last spark of freedom among a greatly-daring and greatly-injured people; on the other hand, the desperate relics of a gallant nation devoting themselves to rescue their bleeding country, or perish with her. Liberty! thou art a prize truly; never canst thou be too dearly bought!" The simplicity and vigour of this most heroic of modern lyrics were injured by lengthening the fourth line of each verse to suit the air of Lewie Gordon.

The "Vision of Liberty," and "Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled!" were to form part of the long-meditated drama of "The Bruce." This the Poet intimated to his friends in conversation, and also in pencil memoranda on one of the blank leaves of Collins's poems. Several lines of verse are scattered among the prose—all shewing on what topic he was musing:—

"Where Bannockburn's ensanguined flood,
Swell'd with mingling hostile blood,
Saw Edward's myriads struck with deep dismay,
And Scotia's troop of brothers win their way.
O glorious deed, to brave a tyrant's band!
O heavenly joy, to free our native land!"

His thoughts now and then inclined to dramatic composition, and hovered between the serious and the comic.—"I have turned my thoughts," he says to Lady Glencairn, "on the drama. I do not mean the stately buskin of the tragic music. Does not your Ladyship think that an Edinburgh audience would be more amused with the affectation, folly,

and whim of true Scottish growth, than by manners which by far the greatest part of the audience can only know at second-hand?" "There is no question that dialogues, characters, and songs, such as Burns could conceive and write, would have been welcome to a northern, and perhaps a southern audience. His inimitable "Jolly Beggars" shews dramatic powers of a high order.

Burns, in his earlier days, lent his muse as an auxiliary to the western clergy; nor can it be forgotten that she fought their battle with a boldness which was only endured because the cause was thought to be a pious one. In Nithsdale she became a volunteer in a more worldly strife, and lent her breath to augment or allay the flame of a contested election. When Sir James Johnston of Westerhall, in the year 1790, offered himself as a candidate for the Dumfries district of burghs, he was opposed by Patrick Millar the younger of Dalswinton. The former was a good man, of an old family, and a determined Tory; the latter was a captain in the army, had the promise of youth upon him, and was a resolute Whig. Burns, through the impulse of his genius, was somewhat of a republican. Old jacobitical prejudices, and the kindness of Grahame of Fintray, inclined his feelings towards the Tories; while his connexion with Millar, his regard for M'Murdo, his respect for Staig, and his affection for Syme, all combined to draw him towards the Whigs. His election-ballads of this period shew how prudently he balanced the various interests. The first of these compositions is not inappropriately called "The

Five Carlines." The burghs of Dumfries, Lochmaben, Annan, Kirkcudbright, and Sanquhar are cleverly personified in the second verse :—

"There was Maggie by the banks o' Nith,
 A dame wi' pride eneugh;
And Marjorie o' the mony Lochs,
 A carline auld and teugh;
And blinkin' Bess o' Annandale,
 That dwelt by Solway side;
And whiskey Jean, that took her gill
 In Galloway sae wide;
And black Joan frae Crichton-Peel,
 O' gipsey kith and kin:
Five wighter carlines werena foun'
 The south countrie within."

The Border dames hesitate whether to send "The belted knight" or "The sodger youth to Lunnun town, to bring them tidings :"—

"Then out spak mim-mou'd Meg of Nith,
 And she spake up wi' pride;
And she wad send the sodger youth,
 Whatever might betide."

Not so honest Kirkcudbright :—

"Then whiskey Jean spake owre her drink—
 'Ye weel ken kimmers a',
The auld gudeman o' Lunnun town,
 His back's been at the wa';
And mony a friend that kissed his cup
 Is now a fremit wight,
But it's ne'er be said o' whiskey Jean—
 I'll send the Border Knight.' "

I have heard Sir Walter Scott recite the verse which personifies Lochmaben, and call it "uncommonly happy :"—

"Then slow rose Marjorie o' the Lochs,
 And wrinkled was her brow;
Her ancient weed was russet gray,
 Her auld Scots blood was true."

"The Five Carlines," says one of Burns's biogra-

phers, "is by far the best-humoured of these productions." He had not seen the Poet's Epistle on the same election, addressed to Grahame of Fintray. The original is before me: the measure was new to Burns: the poem is, I believe, new to the reader. The contest was now decided.—"The Sirens of Flattery," as the Poet said to M'Murdo, "the Harpies of Corruption and the Furies of Ambition—those infernal deities that preside over the villainous business of politics"—had retired from the field:—

"Fintray, my stay in worldly strife,
Friend of my muse, friend of my life,
Are ye as idle's I am?
Come then wi' uncouth kintra fleg,
O'er Pegasus I'll fling my leg,
And ye shall see me try him.

I'll sing the zeal Drumlanrig bears,
Who left the all-important cares
Of princes and their darlin's,
And bent on winning borough-toons,
Came shaking hands wi' wabster loons,
And kissin' barefoot carlins.

Combustion through our boroughs rode,
Whistling his roaring pack abroad
Of mad unmuzzled lions;
As Queensberry's 'buff and blue' unfurled,
And Westerha' and Hopetoun hurled
To every Whig defiance."

The Poet then proceeds to relate how his grace of Queensberry forsook the contending ranks—

"The unmannered dust might soil his star;
Besides, he hated bleeding,"

but left friends, soft and persuasive, behind to maintain his cause and Millar's:—

"M'Murdo and his lovely spouse
(The enamoured laurels kiss her brows)
Led on the Loves and Graces;
She won each gaping burgess' heart,
While he, all conquering, played his part
Amang the wives and lasses.

Craigdarroch led a light-arm'd core,
Tropes, metaphors, and figures pour
Like Hecla streaming thunder;
Glenriddel, skilled in mouldy coins,
Blew up each Tory's dark designs,
And bared the treason under."

Assistance, of a kind equally effective in all such contests, it seems, was resorted to:—

"Millar brought up the artillery ranks,
The many-pounders of the banks."

The commotion which ensued, when the contending parties met in the streets of old Dumfries, is well described:—

"As Highland crags by thunder cleft,
When lightnings fire the stormy lift,
Hurl down with crashing rattle;
As flames among a hundred woods;
As headlong foam a hundred floods—
Such is the rage of battle.

The stubborn Tories dare to die,—
As soon the rooted oaks would fly
Before the approaching fellers;
The Whigs come on like Ocean's roar,
When all his wintry billows pour
Against the Buchan Bullers."

Forms were present, it seems, visible only to the eyes of the inspired: on the Whig side appeared an ominous personage—

"The muffled murderer of Charles."

Purer spirits, those of the Grahames, were seen on the side of the Tories. But neither the wit of woman, the might of man, nor even the presence of the celestials could hinder the defeat of Johnston and the triumph of Millar: the Poet makes his lament:—

"O that my een were flowing burns,
My voice a lioness, that mourns
Her darling cubs' undoing!

That I might weep, that I might cry,
While Tories fall, while Tories fly,
And furious Whigs pursuing!
Thou, Pitt, shalt rue this overthrow,
And Thurlow growl a curse of woe,
And Melville melt in wailing;
How Fox and Sheridan rejoice,
And Burke shall sing 'O Prince, arise!
Thy power is all prevailing.'"

"With regard to your poor Bard," says Burns, "he is only a spectator of what he relates. Amid the hurly-burly of politics he resembles the redbreast in the storm, which shelters itself in the hedge and chirps away securely."

In the four years which intervened between this borough contest and the county election, in which Heron of Kerroughtree, was opposed by Gordon of Balmaghie, the temper of Burns seems to have suffered a serious change. In his lyrics he st sings with gentleness, and with all the delicacy which becomes true love; but in his election lampoons he is fierce and stern, and even venomous. Heron was a Whig; he had erected an altar to Independence, and, through the agency it is said of Syme, prevailed on the Poet to bring verse to the aid of his cause. The first of these effusions is a parody on "Fye! let us a' to the bridal." The Poet numbers the friends of the candidates, and as he names them gives us a sketch, personal and mental. The portrait of Heron is happy:—

"And there will be trusty Kerroughtree,
Whose honour was ever his law;
If the virtues were packed in a parcel,
His worth might be sample for a'."

The best stanzas are the personal ones; the following verse is very characteristic:—

"And there will be maiden Kilkerran,
And also Barskimmens' gude knight;
And there will be roaring Birkwhistle,
Wha luckily roars in the right."

He continues his catalogue; he brings "the Maxwells in droves" from the Nithsdale border; the lairds of Terraughty and Carruchan—

"And also the wild Scot of Galloway,
Sodgering gunpowder Blair."

In spite of the Poet's song and the exertions of friends, Heron lost his election: he was not, however, daunted: he contested soon after with more success the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright against the Hon. Montgomery Stewart. Burns had still the same belief in the influence of his wit, and was ready with unpremeditated verse. He accordingly imagined himself a pedlar or troggar, and, declaring that his whole stock consisted of

"The broken trade of Broughton,"

proceeded to sell, to all who ventured to buy, the characters of those who supported Stewart. Some of the descriptions of the facetious pedlar are comical enough; he disliked John Stewart, Earl of Galloway, and assailed him, with all the inveteracy of satiric verse:—

"Here's a noble earl's
Fame and high renown
For an auld sang—
It's thought the gudes were stown."

Against the Bushbys he bent the bitterest shafts in his quiver; he allowed them talent: in a former satire he says of one,

"He has gotten the heart of a Bushby,
But, Lord! what's become of the head?"

He is equally unkind in the present lampoon. Of John Bushby, of Tinwald-downs, the most accomplished of the name, and Maxwell of Cardoness, he says,—

"Here's an honest conscience
Might a prince adorn,
Frae the Downs of Tinwald
Sae was never worn:
Here's its stuff and lining,
Cardoness's head;
Fine for a sodger
A' the wale o' lead."

Muirhead, minister of Orr, had an apple for his cognizance:—

"Here's armorial bearings
Frae the manse of Orr,
The crest—an old crab apple,
Rotten at the core."

The minister of Buittle was a Maxwell:—

"Here's that little wadset,
Buittle's scrap of truth,
Pawned in a gin-shop,
Quenching holy drouth."

To conclude these sharp and personal things, the Poet offers for sale the worth and wisdom of Copeland of Collieston, and, more curious still,

"Murray's fragments
Of the ten commands."

But customers seem scarce, upon which he exclaims,

"Hornie's turning chapman,
He'll buy all the pack."

And so ends his last and bitterest lampoon.—"I have privately," he says to Mr. Heron, "printed a good many copies of the ballad, and have sent them among friends all about the country. You have already, as your auxiliary, the sober detestation of mankind on the heads of your opponents; and I

swear, by the lyre of Thalia, to muster on your side all the votaries of honest laughter and fair, candid ridicule." Heron, on whose side the Poet promised to muster the votaries of mirth, was victorious in the contest; but his return was petitioned against: a Committee of the Commons declared him unduly elected; and he survived this unlooked for decision but a few days.

The wit of Burns, like his native thistle, though rough and sharp, suited the multitude better than more smooth and polished things: he had not the art of cutting blocks with a razor, but dragged his victims rudely along the ground at the tail of his Pegasus. Pointed and elegant satire, while it affected the educated gentlemen against whom it was directed, would have made no impression on the shepherds and husbandmen whose scorn it was the Poet's wish to excite. The laughter and ridicule which his muse awakened had a local influence only; the satire which drove Dr. Hornbook from the parish, and made Holy Willie think of suicide, had a wider range: the lineaments by which he desired we should know his Stewarts, Maxwells, Murrays, Muirheads and Bushbys, belonged to private life—were accidents of character or matters of imagination, and pertained not to general nature.

I turn gladly to his lyrics. His songs bear the impress of nature; he himself tells us in what way he made them.—"Until I am complete master of the tune in my own singing, such as it is, I can never compose for it. My way is this: I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the

musical expression; then choose my theme; begin one stanza; when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature around me that are in unison or harmony with the cogitations of my fancy and workings of my bosom; humming, every now and then, the air with the verses I have framed. When I feel my muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swinging, at intervals, on the hind-legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures as my pen goes on. Seriously, this at home is almost invariably my way." He who desires to compose lyric verse according to the character and measure of an air, will find the plan of Burns an useful one. The poet must either chaunt the tune over to himself, or be under its influence while writing, else he will fail to get the emphatic words to harmonize with the emphatic notes.

In the art of uniting gracefully the music and words, Burns was a great master; the song which he wrote in October, 1793, to the tune of "The Quaker's Wife," echoes the music so truly that the words and air seem to have sprung from his fancy together:—

"Thine am I, my faithful fair,
Thine, my lovely Nancy;
Every pulse along my veins,
Every roving fancy."

The inspiration which produced "Lovely Nancy" came from Edinburgh; that which gave "Wilt thou be my dearie," to the air of the "Sutor's Daughter," belonged to Dumfries. The former is written with

warmth—the latter with respect. He delighted little in distant modes of salutation, and was prone to imagine the subject of his song beside him, and sharing in his rapture: now and then, however, he exhibited all the polite respect which the school of chivalrous courtship could desire:—

"Lassie, say thou lo'es me;
Or if thou wilt na be my ain,
Say na thou'lt refuse me;
If it winna, canna be,
Thou for thine may choose me,
Let me, lassie, quickly die,
Trusting that thou lo'es me."

The Lady Elizabeth Heron, of Heron, inspired the "Banks of Cree"—not by the charms of her person, but by the music, which is her own composition. Cree is a stream beautiful and romantic:—Cluden is another stream, which runs not smoother down the vale of Dalgonar than it runs in the song of "My bonnie dearie"—

"Hark! the mavis' evening sang,
Sounding Cluden woods amang,
Then a faulding let us gang,
My bonnie dearie;
We'll gae down by Cluden side,
Through the hazels spreading wide,
O'er the waves that sweetly glide
To the moon sae clearly."

When Burns had done searching old-wives' barrels, or galloping under the light of the moon along the sands of Solway in search of smugglers, he retired to the solitude of his own humble dwelling, or to some lonely place, and imagining beauty to be present, sung of its influence with equal truth and elegance. The Lass of Craigie-burn-wood seems to have been a favourite model for his heroines; he advises Thom-

son to adopt his song in her praise, and observes,—"The lady on whom it was made is one of the finest women in Scotland; and, in fact, is to me what Sterne's Eliza was to him—a mistress, or friend, or what you will, in the guileless simplicity of Platonic love. I assure you, that to my lovely friend you are indebted for many of my best songs. Do you think that the sober, gin-house routine of existence, could inspire a man with life, and love, and joy—could fire him with enthusiasm, or melt him with pathos equal to the genius of your book? No, no! Whenever I want to be more than ordinary in song—to be in some degree equal to your diviner airs—do you imagine I fast and pray for the celestial emanation? *Tout au contraire!* I have a glorious recipe—the very one that, for his own use, was invented by the god of healing and poetry, when erst he piped to the flocks of Admetus. I put myself in a regimen of admiring a fine woman, and in proportion to the adorability of her charms, in proportion are you delighted with my verses? The lightning of her eye is the godhead of Parnassus, and the witching of her smile the divinity of Helicon!"

The offspring of one of these interviews, real or imaginary, was that fine lyric—"She says she lo'es me best of a'." The lady's portrait is limned with the most exquisite skill; and the last verse contains a landscape such as the goddess of love might desire to walk in. The lonely valley, the fragrant evening, and the rising moon were frequent witnesses of his poetic rapture:—

"Let others love the city,
The gaudy show at sunny noon,
Gie me the lonely valley,
The dewy eve, and rising moon;
Fair beaming, and streaming
Her silver light the boughs amang,
While falling, re-calling,
The amorous thrush concludes his sang;
There, dearest Chloris, wilt thou rove
By wimpling burn and leafy shaw,
And hear my vows of truth and love,
And say thou lo'es me best of a'?"

The influence of this lady's charms was not of short duration.—"On my visit the other day," Burns says, "to my fair Chloris, she suggested an idea, which I, in my return from the visit, wrought into the following song:

"My Chloris, mark how green the groves,
The primrose banks how fair;
The balmy gales awake the flowers,
And wave thy flaxen hair."

Having composed another pastoral song in praise of the same lady to the tune of "Rothemurches Rant," he says—"This piece has at least the merit of being a regular pastoral; the vernal morn, the summer noon, the autumnal evening, and the winter night are regularly rounded. If I can catch myself in more than an ordinary propitious moment, I shall write a new 'Craigie-burn-wood' altogether: my heart is much in the theme. The lady is not a little proud that she is to make so distinguished a figure in your collection; and I am not a little proud that I have it in my power to please her so much." The air of "Lumps of Pudding" suggested enjoyments of a less ethereal kind than those arising from beauty. On the 18th of November the frost was dry and keen.* The Poet took a morning walk before breakfast, and produced one of his most delightful songs—

"Contented wi' little and cantie wi' mair,
Whene'er I forgather wi' sorrow and care,
I gie them a skelp as they're creeping alang
Wi' a cog o' gude swats, and an auld Scottish sang.

I whyles claw the elbow o' troublesome thought,
But man is a sodger, and life is a faught;
My mirth and good humour are coin in my pouch,
And my freedom's my lairdship nae monarch dare touch."

When his spirit was in the right mood for song, Burns generally remembered his country: indeed, the glory of Scotland was as dear to his heart as his own fame. This sentiment he gave full utterance to in his song of "Their groves o' sweet myrtle." He muses on the bright summers and perfumed vales of Italy, and then turns to the glen of green breckan, where the burn glimmers under the yellow broom, on whose banks he had held tryste with his Jean. The conclusion which he makes is at once national and affectionate:—

"Though rich is the breeze in their gay sunny vallies,
And cauld Caledonia's blast on the wave,
Their sweet scented woodlands that skirt the proud palace,
What are they? the haunt of the tyrant and slave.
The slave's spicy forests and gold bubbling fountains
The brave Caledonian views with disdain;
He wanders as free as the winds of his mountains,
Save love's willing fetters—the chains of his Jean."

That the Poet loved his country, he has shown in many a lasting verse; but when he thought of the splendid possessions of the mean and the sordid, and of the gold descending in showers on the heads of the dull and the undeserving, it required all his poetic philosophy to hinder him from repining. He had sung in other days of the honest joys and fireside happiness of husbandmen: he now endeavoured to pour the healing balm of verse upon the wounded spirits of the poor, the humble, and the

unhappy. The song of "For a' that, and a' that," must have been welcome to many. It flew like wildfire over the land: the sentiments accorded with the natural desire of man to be free and equal; and, though not permitted to be sung in the streets of some of our northern borough-towns, it was chaunted among the hills and dales by every tongue. In January, 1795, Burns introduced it in these words to Thomson:—"A great critic on song, Aiken, says that love and wine are the exclusive themes for song-writing. The following is on neither subject, and consequently is no song; but will be allowed, I think, to be two or three pretty good prose thoughts inverted into rhyme." There are five verses in all, and every one strikes the balance against rank in favour of poverty—

"A king can make a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Gude faith he maunna fa' that;
For a' that, and a' that,
Our toils obscure and a' that;
The rank is but the guinea-stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that."

Those who judge of the peace of mind and happiness of the Poet by the sentiments of affection and rapture which he expresses so easily and so elegantly in his songs, would imagine that he lived in a sort of paradise, beset by temptation certainly, yet triumphing alike over political hatred and social allurements. His bright outbursts of verse flashed like sunshine amid a winter storm; they were fever-fits of gladness and joy—came too seldom, and their coming could not be calculated upon. The inqui-

sitorial proceedings of the Commissioners of Excise had a deep share in the ruin of Burns. He was permitted to continue on his seventy pounds a-year, with the chance of rising to the station of Supervisor by seniority; but the hope of becoming Collector could no more be indulged—it was a matter of political patronage. From that time forward, something seemed to prey on the Poet's mind: he believed himself watched and marked; he hurried from company into solitude, and from solitude into company; when alone, he was melancholy and desponding—when at table, his mirth was often wild and obstreperous; he had passionate bursts of pathos and unbridled sallies of humour, more than were natural to him.

He had for some time looked on men of rank with jealousy; he now spoke of them in a way that amounted to dislike.—"Let me remind you," he thus writes to David Macculloch of Ardwell, June 21, 1791, "of your kind promise to accompany me to Kerroughtree; I will need all the friends I can muster; for I am indeed ill at ease whenever I approach your honourables and right honourables." In a letter to his friend Cunningham, he speaks of the conceited dignity which even Scottish lordlings, of seven centuries standing, display when they mix accidentally with the many-aproned sons of mechanical life.—"I remember," he says, "in my plough-boy days, I could not conceive it possible that a noble lord could be a fool, or a godly man could be a knave: how ignorant are plough-boys!"

Something of the same stern spirit may be found

in many places of his correspondence. He seemed to imagine that he could not be in the company of men of rank without having to acknowledge his own inferior condition in life; he did not feel so much as he ought that his genius raised him to an equality with peers, and even princes; or, if he felt it fully, he certainly failed to act up to it. He appeared, too, to apprehend that courtesy on his part might be taken for servility, and he desired to show, by silent and surly haughtiness, that he might be broken, but would not bend. Even his most intimate friends he now and then put at arms-length; and if he made a present of a song or a new edition of his poems to any one, he generally recorded it as a gift of affection, and not as an act of homage.—"Will Mr. M'Murdo," he says, in 1793," do me the favour to accept of these volumes? a trifling but sincere mark of the very high respect I bear for his worth as a man, his manners as a gentleman, and his kindness as a friend. However inferior now or afterwards I may rank as a poet, one honest virtue, to which few poets can pretend, I trust I shall ever claim as mine—to no man, whatever his station in life or his power to serve me, have I ever paid a compliment at the expense of truth."

The witty boldness of his remarks, and the sarcastic freedom of his opinions in matters both of church and state, it must be confessed, were such as to startle the timid and alarm the devout. He was numbered among those who were possessed with a republican spirit, and all who had any hopes of rising through political influence were more willing to

find Burns by chance than seek his company of their own free will. This will account for the coldness with which many of the stately aristocracy of the district regarded him. Mr. Maculloch of Ardwell has been heard to relate, that, on visiting Dumfries one fine evening, to attend a ball given during the week of the races, he saw Burns walking on the south side of the "plain-stanes," while the central part was crowded with ladies and gentlemen drawn together for the festivities of the night. Not one of them took any notice of the Poet; on which Mr. Maculloch went up to him, took his arm, and wished him to join the gentry.—"Nay, nay," he said, "that's all over with me now.

'O! were we young now as we ance hae been,
We should hae been galloping down on yon green,
And linking it owre the lily white lea,
And were na my heart light I wad die.'"

He took his friend home; and while Mrs. Burns, with her sweet and melodious voice, sung one of her husband's latest lyrics, the Poet prepared a bowl of social punch, which they discussed with no little mirth and glee till the hour of the ball arrived. A gentleman, the other day, told me that when he visited Dumfries in the year 1793, he was warned by one or more of the leading men of the county to avoid the society of Burns, who neither believed in religion as the kirk believed, nor took the fashion of his politics from the government.

Burns imputed his disgrace in the Excise to the officers of a regiment then lying in Dumfries, some of whom, he believed, informed the government of his rash language. That he seldom spoke of them but with bitterness and scorn, his correspondence

will in some places witness.—"I meant," he thus writes to Mrs. Riddel, "to have called on you yesternight; but as I edged up to your box-door, the first object which greeted my view was one of those lobster-coated puppies, sitting like another dragon guarding the Hesperian fruit. On the conditions and capitulations you so obligingly offer, I shall certainly make my rustic phiz a part of your box furniture on Tuesday."

His dislike of soldiers found its way into his conversation.—"When I was at Arbigland in 1793," said my accomplished friend Mrs. Montagu, "I was introduced to Burns. His conversation pleased me much, and I saw him often. I was at a ball given by the Caledonian Hunt in Dumfries, and had stood up as the partner of a young officer in the dance, when the whisper of 'there's Burns!' ran through the assembly. I looked round, and there he was—his bright dark eyes full upon me. I shall never forget that look—it was one that gave me no pleasure. He soon left the meeting. I saw him next day. He would have passed me, but I spoke. I took his arm, and said, come, you must see me home. 'Gladly, madam,' said he; 'but I'll not go down the plain-stanes, lest I have to share your company with some of those epauletted puppies with whom the street is full. Come this way.' We went to Captain Hamilton's. Burns, I remember, took up a newspaper in which some of the letters of a man of genius lately dead were printed. 'This is sad,' he said: 'did I imagine that one-half of the letters which I have written would be published

when I die, I would this moment recal them, and burn them without redemption.'" Colonel Jenkinson, who commanded the Cinque-Ports cavalry, inherited, it would seem, the dislike of his brother soldiers to the Poet; he refused to be introduced to Burns, and never even spoke to him. This was not in keeping with the character of the mild and gentle Earl of Liverpool.

Of his situation as an exciseman, Burns seldom spoke with much cordiality. He generally introduced it with an apology, and coupled it with something which carried the mind into a new train of thought. "Amid all my hurry of business," he writes in 1792 to Cunningham, "grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the Excise —making ballads, and then drinking and singing them, I might have stolen five minutes to dedicate to one of the first of friends and fellow-creatures." Two years afterwards he writes with some bitterness:—"I am a miserable hurried devil, and for private reasons, am forced, like Milton's Satan,

'To do what yet, though damn'd, I would abhor.'"

Of his prospects as a revenue officer, we have his own account given to Patrick Heron, whom he had aided at the hustings with election squibs.—"I am on the supervisor's list; and as we come on there by precedency, in two or three years I shall be at the head of the list, and be appointed, of course. Then a Friend might be of service to me in getting me into a part of the kingdom which I would like. A supervisor's income varies from about one hundred and twenty to two hundred a-year; but the business

is an incessant drudgery, and would be nearly a complete bar to every species of literary pursuit. The moment I am appointed supervisor in the common routine, I may be nominated on the collector's list, and this is always a business purely of political patronage. A collectorship varies from better than two hundred a-year to near a thousand. They also come forward by precedency on the list, and have besides a handsome income, a life of complete leisure. A life of literary leisure, with a decent competence, is the summit of my wishes. It would be the prudish affectation of silly pride in me to say that I do not need, nor would not be indebted to, a political friend. At the same time, sir, I by no means lay my affairs before you, thus to hook my dependent situation on your benevolence."

During this period of the life of Burns, and indeed as early as the close of the year 1792, some of his friends, hearkening to rumours injurious to his name, volunteered counsel or reproof. The wreck of all his speculations and hopes preyed on his mind, and he sought to escape in company from his own reflections. To one of his sensiblity of mind, the future loured ominous and dark. The company of a man of his eminence, and wonderful colloquial powers, was much in request; for many loved his genius, and all did not fear the frowns of men in office. Mrs. Dunlop was the first that admonished.—"You must not think, as you seem to insinuate," replied the Poet, "that in my way of life I want exercise. Of that I have enough: but occasional hard drinking is the devil to me. Against this I have again and

again bent my resolution, and have greatly succeeded. Taverns I have totally abandoned. It is the private parties in the family way, among the hard-drinking gentlemen of this county, that do me the mischief—but even this I have more than half given over." The view which Burns takes of his situation is illustrated by an apology tendered to Mrs. Riddel, after a social bout at her too hospitable table.—"I write you," he says, "from the regions of hell, amid the horrors of the damned. Here am I, laid on a bed of pitiless furze, while an infernal tormentor, wrinkled and cruel, called Recollection, with a whip of scorpions, forbids peace or rest to approach me, and keeps anguish eternally awake. I wish I could be reinstated in the good opinion of the fair circle, whom my conduct last night so much offended! To the men of the company I will make no apology. Your husband, who insisted on my drinking more than I chose, has no right to blame me, and the other gentlemen were partakers of my guilt." The Poet erred as others erred.

It must have surprised Burns not a little when William Nicol lifted up his voice and admonished him. The Poet answered, in a manner so cutting and ironical, that the irascible pedant was silent ever afterwards.—"O! thou wisest among the wise, meridian blaze of prudence, full moon of discretion, and chief of many counsellors; how infinitely is thy rattleheaded, wrong-headed slave indebted to thy supereminent goodness, that, from the luminous path of thy own right-lined rectitude, thou lookest benignly down on an erring wretch, of whom the

zigzag wanderings defy all the powers of calculation, from the simple copulation of units up to the hidden mysteries of fluxions! From the cave of my ignorance, amid the fogs of my dulness, and pestilential fumes of my political heresies, I look up to thee as doth a toad through the iron-barred lucerne of a pestiferous dungeon to the cloudless glory of a summer sun! Sorely sighing, in bitterness of soul I say, when shall my name be the quotation of the wise, and my countenance be the delight of the godly, like the illustrious lord of Laggan's many hills—that father of proverbs and master of maxims—that antipode of folly and magnet among the sages, the wise and witty Willie Nicol? As for thee, thy thoughts are pure, and thy lips are holy—never did the unhallowed breath of the powers of darkness and the pleasures of darkness pollute the sacred flame of thy sky-descended and heaven-bound desires. O! that like thine were the tenor of my life! like thine the tenor of my conversation—then should no friend fear for my strength, no enemy rejoice in my weakness."

The indifferent success of Nicol seems not to have awed John Syme, who, in his parlour at Ryedale one afternoon, when the wine flowed and the Poet was gracious and confidential, took upon him the ungentle task of admonishing his guest.—"I might have spoken daggers," said he, "but I did not mean them: Burns shook to the inmost fibre of his frame, and drew his sword-cane, when I exclaimed, 'What! wilt thou thus, and in mine own house?' The poor fellow was so stung with remorse, that he dashed

himself down on the floor." Syme told the story, in a rather darker manner, to Sir Walter Scott, who thus related it in one of his criticisms.—"It is a dreadful truth that, when racked and tortured by the well-meant and warm expostulations of an intimate friend, he started up in a paroxysm of frenzy, and, drawing a sword-cane which he usually wore, made an attempt to plunge it into the body of his adviser—the next instant he was with difficulty withheld from suicide." I have heard a much gentler version of the story: indeed it has several variations, and a biographer has some latitude of choice. This is the last and mildest.—"When I expostulated with Burns," said Syme, "he stared at me, and with such fury of look, that, had a sword been in his hand, I am sure he would have run me through."

There is no doubt that the Poet was strongly moved. When his friend took it upon him to speak of the evil of his ways, did he lecture him upon the madness which wine excites—upon the sinfulness of incontinence, or on the guilt of pocketing money from a Tory government while he was himself a democrat or a Whig? Admonition from Syme upon one or all of these topics of reproach was more likely to induce the Poet to laugh, as he did at Nicol, than to make him draw his sword. "O! Geordie man," said king James, "it was grand to hear Baby Charles laying down the guilt of dissimulation, and Steenie lecturing on the turpitude of incontinence." I cannot disprove the story, nor yet can I altogether believe it.

This strange tale induced some to believe that Burns was capable of drawing his sword on the unarmed and defenceless. Those who are persuaded of that will feel disposed to doubt his courage in a dispute into which he was precipitated during a drinking bout at a friend's table.—"I was I know," he says, "drunk last night, but I am sober this morning. From the expressions Captain ——— made use of to me, had I nobody's welfare to care for but my own, we should certainly have come, according to the manner of the world, to the necessity of murdering one another about the business. The words were such as generally, I believe, end in a brace of pistols; but I am still pleased to think that I did not risk the peace and welfare of a wife and children in a drunken squabble. You know that the report of certain political opinions being mine has already brought me to the brink of destruction. I dread last night's business may be interpreted the same way. You, I beg, will take care to prevent it. I tax your wish for my welfare with that of waiting, as soon as possible, on every gentleman who was present, and state this to him, and, as you please, shew him this letter. What, after all, was the obnoxious toast? 'May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause.' A toast that the most outrageous frenzy of loyalty cannot object to."

I know not what the import of those words were in the year 1795; they seem harmless enough now: but a disloyal meaning seems to have been attached to them by some gunpowder captain, who desired to

find that practice at home among civilians which he might have obtained from disciplined hands abroad. He seems to have felt that some insult to the government was meant, though he did not exactly understand what, and bit his glove in token of mortal wrath. With the morning, sobriety brought reflection to both sides; and Clarke found little trouble in restoring harmony, which is lucky; for had a duel ensued, the Poet's biographer would have experienced some difficulty in accounting for it. It was probably on this occasion that Burns bought a brace of pistols from Johnson, the gunsmith, and having tried them, wrote – "I have proved the pistols, and can say of them, what I would not do of the bulk of mankind—they are an honour to their maker."

Amid these intemperate quarrels and political heart-burnings, the muse of Burns was not wholly idle; confounded though she no doubt was, with the unmelodious and mingled cries of loyalty and sedition which filled every borough town, she not only inspired lyrics, tender and harmonious, but added a poem or two to those already published. Among the latter are some felicitous verses to "The Maxwells' veteran chief," the Laird of Terraughty, on his birth day.

"If envious buckies view wi' sorrow
Thy lengthened days on this blest morrow,
May Desolation's lang teeth'd harrow,
Nine miles an hour,
Rake them like Sodom and Gomorrha
In brunstane stoure."

The true spirit of the Poet flashes out also in his "Address to the Tooth-ache:" there are few who cannot attest the accuracy of the description:—

"My curse upon thy venom'd stang,
That shoots my tortured gums alang,
And through my lugs gives mony a twang,
Wi' gnawing vengeance,
Tearing my nerves wi' bitter pang,
Like racking engines.

"Of a' the numerous human dools,
Ill har'sts, daft bargains, cutty stools,
Or worthy friends raked i' the mools,
Sad sight to see,
The tricks o' knaves, the fash o' fools,
Thou bear'st the gree."

It was now his pleasure to satirize the beautiful Maria Woodleigh—Mrs. Riddel. How this fair and favoured lady happened to move his indignation, is something of a mystery. She was young and accomplished: her verses have more of nature in them than the ordinary lines of lady-poetesses; and her letters are lively and witty, and partake not a little of the sarcastic turn of the Poet's own mind. On introducing her in 1793 to Smellie, Burns said, "She has one unlucky failing—a failing which you will easily discover, as she seems rather pleased with indulging in it—and a failing which you will easily pardon, as it is a sin which very much besets yourself. Where she dislikes or despises, she is as apt to make no more a secret of it than where she esteems and respects." In a rhyme epistle Burns seems to complain that this young beauty paid more respect to others than to himself:—

"I see her face the first of Ireland's sons,
And even out-Irish his Hibernian bronze.
The hopeful youth in Scotia's senate bred,
Who owns a Bushby's heart without the head,
Comes mid a string of coxcombs to display
That veni, vidi, vici! is his way.
The shrinking Bard adown an alley skulks,
And dreads a meeting as he dreads the hulks;"

> Though there his heresies in church and state
> Might well award him Muir and Palmer's fate."

Though severe in this poem, for he calls her

> "A wit in folly and a fool in wit,"

he reserves his sharpest satire for a regular monody on her memory: he looks on her grave, and exclaims—

> "How cold is that bosom which folly once fired,
> How pale is that cheek where the rouge lately glisten'd;
> How silent that tongue which the echoes oft tired,
> How dull is that ear which to flattery so listen'd!"

He refrains from calling on the Loves and Graces to attend, but summons the offspring of Folly to shower over her idle weeds and typical nettles. He then imagines a monument:—

> "We'll sculpture the marble, we'll measure the lay—
> Here Vanity strums on her idiot lyre;
> There keen Indignation shall dart on his prey,
> Which spurning Contempt shall redeem from his ire."

This sarcastic monody was widely circulated, nor was the object of it kept a secret. In the printed copies the name is Eliza—but why should the truth be concealed? It is to the honour of Mrs. Riddel that, though affected with the lampoon at first, she soon re-relented, and not only forgave the author and received him into favour, but when laid in the grave, and the envious and malicious were making mouths at his fame, she vindicated his aspersed character; and, in an article written with great tenderness and truth, gave us the right image of the man and the poet.

In the year 1795, Britain was threatened by an army of French republicans, and Pitt, in the words of Scott,

> "Brought the freeman's arm to aid the freeman's laws."

Burns at once enrolled himself in the band of gentlemen volunteers of Dumfries, though not without opposition from some of the haughty Tories, who demurred about his principles, which they called democratic. I remember well the appearance of that respectable corps; their odd, but not ungraceful dress; white kerseymere breeches and waistcoat; short blue coat, faced with red; and round hat, surmounted by a bearskin, like the helmets of our Horse-guards; and I remember the Poet also—his very swarthy face, his ploughman-stoop, his large dark eyes, and indifferent dexterity in the handling of his arms. When those "sons of sedition, Syme, Burns, and Maxwell," as a dull epigram of that day worded it, were admitted into the volunteers, it was not without hope that a heroic song, rivalling "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled," might be forthcoming. At a public dinner of the corps, when Burns desired leave to give a toast, the proposal was received with rapturous applause, and something high was hoped for.—"Gentlemen," said he, "may we never see the French—and may the French never see us:" it was drunk, but with a murmur of disapprobation. The Poet felt this; and, on going home, wrote that characteristic and truly national song—"Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?" He sent it to Jackson's Dumfries Journal—a great number of copies were struck off with the music in Edinburgh, and widely circulated by the author.

This lyric may be looked on as containing the sentiments of Burns in matters of government: it reechoed the admirable letter which he addressed to

Erskine of Mar, and expressed what all lovers of Britain felt then, or feel now, on the subject of change and alteration :—

"Does haughty Gaul invasion threat ?
Then let the loons beware, sir,
There's wooden walls upon our seas,
And volunteers on shore, sir :
The Nith shall run to Corsincon,
And Criffel sink in Solway,
Ere we permit a foreign foe
On British ground to rally,

"O ! let us not, like snarling curs,
In wrangling be divided,
Till slap come in an unco loon,
And wi' a rung decide it.
Be Britain still to Britain true,
Amang ourselves united ;
For never but by British hands
Maun British wrangs be righted."

This song hit the taste and suited the feelings of the humbler classes, who added it to "The poor and honest Sodger," the "Song of Death," and "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled." Hills echoed with it ; it was heard in every street, and did more to right the mind of the rustic part of the population than all the speeches of Pitt and Dundas, or of the chosen "Five-and-forty."

At Midsummer, 1794, Burns removed his increasing family from the Bank-Vennel to Mill-hole-brae, where he leased a small house of two stories—plain and humble, but commodious. This street is connected with a wide and respectable one, called the Kirk-gate ; is near the bleaching or parade-ground, on the river-side—a favourite walk in the summer mornings and evenings for the citizens of Dumfries. The choice, though respectable enough, was not a poetical one ; but the house suited his

humble circumstances; and here he arranged his small library, fixed his table, and placed the chair on whose hind-legs, as he relates, he poised or swung himself, when conceiving his matchless lyrics. Here, too, I have heard his townsmen say, while passing by during a pleasant afternoon, they could see, within the open door, the Poet reading amongst his children; while his wife moved about, set matters in order, and looked to the economy of her household. He was welcomed to his new house by most of his early friends; and the ladies, who sympathized in his fortunes, were among the foremost. Of these, one of the mildest and gentlest was Jessie Lewars, now Mrs. Thomson, the sister of a brother-gauger: she felt the genius, and perceived, with Mrs. Burns, the fading looks and declining health of the Poet. and ministered unto him and his young family with all the affection of a daughter.

Burns still continued to correspond with several distinguished persons; the circle of his friends had, however, gradually diminished; the demon of politics made some cold; distance rendered others forgetful; and death had removed one or two to whom he looked up for countenance and support. Riddel of Friars-Carse, in whose company he took much pleasure, died towards the close of 1794; and the last time that Burns was in that neighbourhood, he visited the Hermitage, and wrote on the window, —

"To Riddel, much lamented man,
This ivied cot was dear;
Reader, dost value matchless worth?
This ivied cot revere."

Sickness and death came next to the Poet's own

household.—"I have lately," he says to Mrs. Dunlop, "drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance too, and so rapidly, as to put it out of my power to pay the last duties to her. I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock, when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever; and long the die spun doubtful, until, after many weeks of a sick bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once, indeed, have been before my own door in the street." To the same lady he again writes, as he ever wrote to her, in a strain of serious thought and deep emotion:—"There had much need be many pleasures annexed to the states of husband and father; for, God knows, they have many peculiar cares. I cannot describe to you the anxious, sleepless hours these ties frequently give me. I see a train of helpless little folks; me and my exertions all their stay; and on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang! If I am nipt off at the command of fate—even in all the vigour of manhood, as I am, such things happen every day—gracious God! what would become of my little flock? 'Tis here that I envy your people of fortune."

The Poet was now and then in a more sportive mood; despondency was lifted from him like a cloud, and his mind lay in sunshine for an hour or so, till reflection darkened it down again. He loved to ponder on the fate of men of genius.—"There is not," he said to Helen Craik of Arbigland, "among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets. In the compara-

tive view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but what they are able to bear. Take a being of our kind; give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility—which, between them, will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary—such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of butterflies; in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase; fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity—and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet."

Burns looked with a mistrusting eye towards future fortune; he saw no outlet for his ambition; poetry had done all for him that poetry was likely to do; and he desired distinction without the means of gratifying it. He sometimes lamented to friends that he could not find his way into the House of Commons; he felt a strong call towards oratory, and all who heard him speak—and some of them were excellent judges—admitted his wonderful quickness of apprehension and readiness of eloquence. He seemed inclined to believe that misfortune had marked him out for her own, and that evil was the only certainty in life.—"In this short stormy day of fleeting

existence," he observes to Mrs. Montagu, "when you now and then meet with an individual whose acquaintance is a real acquisition, there are all the probabilities against you that you will never meet with that character more. On the other hand, if there is any miscreant whom you hate, or creature whom you despise, the ill run of chances will be so against you, that, in the jostlings and turnings of life, pop at some unlucky corner eternally comes the wretch upon you, and will not allow your indignation or contempt one moment's repose."

It cannot be denied that Burns had a fancy fruitful in images of misery—that he looked on earth and thought the water nought and the ground barren, and believed its surface to be infested with a hundred dolts and scoundrels for one wise and honest man.—"Sunday," says the Poet to Mrs. Riddel, "closes a period of our curst revenue business, and may probably keep me employed with my pen till noon—fine employment for a poet's pen! There is a species of the human genus that I call the gin-horse class: what amiable dogs they are! round, and round, and round they go. Mundell's ox that turns his cotton-mill is their exact prototype—without an idea or wish beyond their circle; fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented; while here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a damned mélange of fretfulness and melancholy, not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement like a wildfinch caught amid the horrors of winter and newly thrust into a cage.

Well, I am persuaded it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied when he foretold: 'And behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper.'"

During the year 1795, rumour was busy with the name of Burns. Those—and I am sorry to say they were not few—who longed for his halting, whispered about that he was become a lover of low company—a seeker of consolation against imaginary woes, in the bottle; and that in his Howff, as he called the Globe tavern, he forgot what was due to his dignity of mind and his domestic peace; nay, they hesitated not to insinuate that his very genius was sunk and fallen, like Milton's Satan, from its original brightness. Much of this required no refutation. Burns was fallen off, indeed!—not in brightness of genius, but in vigour and health. His walks were shorter, his rests more frequent; his smile had something of melancholy in it, and amid the sons of men he looked like one marked out for an early grave. My friend, Mrs. Hyslop—daughter of Mr. Geddes of Leith—happened to meet him one day in the streets of Dumfries, and was affected by his appearance. He stooped more than was his wont; his dress, about which he used to be rather nice, was disordered and shabby, and he bore on his face the stamp of internal sorrow. The meeting was cordial and warm; on parting he wrung her brother, who accompanied her, earnestly by the hand, turned half away from him, and said, "I am going to ruin as fast as I can; the best I can do is to go consistently."

At this period some of the lofty aristocracy of the country shunned the Poet's company, not for his

conduct as a man, but for his sentiments as a politician. That Burns was frequently in the company of the tradesmen of Dumfries, and joined in their socialities, is perfectly true; his small income hindered him from seeking loftier society: he who has only a shilling in his pocket, must be contented with humble friends. But it is untrue that this was the only company he kept; some of the first gentlemen in the land were still his friends; he was a welcome and an invited guest at their tables, and might be seen walking with their wives and their daughters, when his health enabled him to go abroad.

The best answer which such malevolent representations could receive, has been given by Gray and Findlater; both of these gentlemen lived near the Poet; they were wise and sensible men, and incapable of misrepresentation.—"It came under my own view professionally," said the former, "that Burns superintended the education of his children with a degree of care that I have never seen surpassed. In the bosom of his family he spent many an hour, directing the studies of his eldest son, a boy of uncommon talents. I have frequently found him explaining to this youth, then not more than nine years of age, the poets from Shakspeare to Gray, or storing his mind with examples of heroic virtue, as they live in the pages of the English historians. I would ask any person of common candour, if employments like these are consistent with habitual drunkenness? It is not denied that he sometimes mingled with society unworthy of him; he was of a social and convivial nature. In his morning hours, I never saw him like one suffer-

ing from the effects of last night's intemperance." Almost the last words that Gray uttered to me before he went to India were about Burns :—" I was sometimes surprised," he said, " at the vigour and elegance of Robert's versions from the Latin. I told him he got help ; he looked up in my face and said, ' Yes, my Father helps me.' "

The testimony of Findlater is equally decisive :—" My connexion with Burns," he observed, " commenced immediately after his admission to the Excise, and continued to the hour of his death. In all that time the superintendence of his behaviour, as an officer of the revenue, was a branch of my especial province, and I was not an inattentive observer of the general conduct of a man and a Poet so celebrated by his countrymen. He was exemplary in his attention, and was even jealous of the least imputation on his vigilance. It was not till near the latter end of his days that there was any falling off in this respect ; and this was well accounted for by the pressure of disease and accumulating infirmities. I will further avow, that I never saw him—which was very frequently while he lived at Ellisland, and still more so, almost every day, after he removed to Dumfries—in hours of business but he was quite himself, and capable of discharging the duties of his office ; nor was he ever known to drink by himself, or seen to indulge in the use of liquor in a forenoon. I have seen Burns in all his various phases—in his convivial moments, in his sober moods, and in the bosom of his family. Indeed, I believe I saw more of him than any other individual had occasion to see, and

I never beheld any thing like the gross enormities with which he is now charged. That when he sat down in the evening with friends whom he liked, he was apt to prolong the social hour beyond the bounds which prudence would dictate, is unquestionable; but, in his family, I will venture to say, he was never seen otherwise than as attentive and affectionate in a high degree."

Professor Walker, a gentleman of unquestioned candour, was two days in the Poet's company, during November, 1795.—"I went to Dumfries," he says, "and called upon him early in the forenoon. I found him in a small house; he was sitting on a window-seat, reading, with the doors open, and the family arrangements going on in his presence, and altogether without that appearance of snugness and seclusion which a studious man requires. After conversing with him for some time, he proposed a walk, and promised to conduct me through some of his favourite haunts. We accordingly quitted the town, and wandered a considerable way up the beautiful banks of the Nith. Here he gave me an account of his latest productions, and repeated some satirical ballads which he had composed; these I thought inferior to his other pieces, though they had some lines in which vigour compensated for coarseness. He repeated also a fragment of an Ode to Liberty, with marked and peculiar energy, and showed a disposition, which was easily repressed, to make political remarks."

To this picture of the first day I shall add a sketch of the second:—"On the next morning I

returned with a friend, and we found him ready to pass part of the day with us at the inn. On this occasion I did not think him so interesting as he had appeared at his outset. His conversation was too elaborate; in his praise and censure he was so decisive as to render a dissent from his judgment difficult to be reconciled with the laws of good breeding. His wit was not more licentious than it is in higher circles, though I thought him rather unnecessarily free in the avowal of his excesses. When it began to grow late he showed no disposition to retire, but called for fresh supplies of liquor with a freedom which might be excusable, as we were in an inn and no condition had been made, though it might have been inferred—had the inference been welcome—that he was to consider himself as our guest: nor was it till he saw us worn out that he departed, about three in the morning, with a reluctance that probably proceeded less from being deprived of our company than from being confined to his own. I discovered in his conduct no errors which I had not seen in men who stood high in the favour of society. He on this occasion drank freely, without being intoxicated: a circumstance from which I concluded, not only that his constitution was still unbroken, but that he was not addicted to solitary cordials. Had he tasted liquor in the morning, he must have easily yielded to the excess of the evening." A grave Professor was not likely to speak in commendation of the late hours and deep socialities practised by the Dumfrieshire topers; men in those days seldom quitted the bottle or the punch-bowl before daylight

came to show the way home; and it was likely that Burns imagined he was asserting a proper independence when he desired more liquor and consulted his own inclination.

New year's day, 1796, found the Poet under a triple visitation of poverty, domestic sorrow, and ill health: it is not known that he uttered any compl 'nts; if he desired life it was less for himself than for his wife and children. There is something to me inexpressibly touching in the request which he made to his collector anc' paymaster, Mitchell, for the humble stipend then due, and without which he would have been unable to meet the new year's morning. To render it more accept ıble he made it in rhyme:—

"Friend of the Poet, tried and leal,
Wha wanting thee might beg or steal,
Alake! alake! the mickle deil,
Wi' a' his witches,
Are at it skelping jig and reel,
In my poor pouches."

To this request, which it seem he hesi ted to make, Burns adds a mournful po script concerning his health · –

"You've heard this while how I've been licket,
And by fell Death was nearly nicket
Grim loon, he gat me by the fecket,
And sair me shook;
But by gude luck I lap a wicket,
And turned a nook."

His illness now alarmed his friends. , Maxwell, with equal skill and kindness of heart, attended him carefully: De Peyster, his colonel, a rough veteran, and a rhymer if not a poet, visited him and made frequent inquiries: the ailing man was touched wi' these attentions, and thanked his commander in

verse. I shall transcribe a couple of stanzas—he is always his own best biographer:—

'My honoured colonel, deep I feel
Your interest in the Poet's weal,
Ah! now sma' heart have I to speel
The steep Parnassus,
Surrounded thus by bolus, pill,
And potion glasses."

This world, he goes on to say, would be pleasant, if care and sickness would stay away, and fortune favour worth and merit according to their deservings—the strain concludes sadly:—

"Dame Life, though fiction out may trick her,
And in paste gems, and frippery deck her,
Oh! flickering, feeble, and unsicker
I've found her still,
Ay wavering like the willow wicker,
'Tween gude and ill."

In his lines to Mitchell, Burns seems to acknowledge—for he never spared himself—that he owed some of his illness to folly: in his verses to De Peyster he intimates his meaning more clearly, and blames, but good-humouredly, the spirit of evil—for

"Showing us the tempting ware,
Bright wines, and bonnie lasses fair,
To put us daft."

Thomson began to feel alarm at the ominous silence of the Poet, and inquired the cause; the answer was written in April.—"Alas! I fear it will be some time ere I tune my lyre again. 'By Babel's streams I've sat and wept,' almost ever since I saw you last: I have only known existence by the pressure of the heavy hand of sickness, and have counted time by the repercussions of pain. Rheumatism, cold, and fever have formed to me a terrible combination. I close my eyes in misery, and open them

without hope. I look on the vernal day, and say, with poor Fergusson—

'Say, wherefore has an all-indulgent Heaven
Light to the comfortless and wretched given?'"

The inquiries of Thomson induced his fancy once more to take flight in song: Burns had formerly, in health, sung of beauty with

"Cheeks like apples, which the sun had rudded"

and adorned with smiles: he looked around, and seeing Jessie Lewars watching over him with anxiety on her brow and tenderness in her eyes, he honoured her with one of his happiest songs: it bears her name, and is the last perfect offspring of his muse. In all the compass of verse there is nothing more touching than this exquisite stanza:—

"Altho' thou maun never be mine,
Altho' even hope is denied,
'Tis sweeter for thee despairing
Than aught in the world beside."

As the same young lady was moving with a light foot about the house, lest she should disturb him, the Poet took up a crystal goblet which contained wine and water for moistening his lips, and wrote on it with a diamond,—

"Fill me with the rosy wine,
Call a toast—a toast divine;
Give the Poet's darling flame,
Lovely Jessie be the name;
Then thou mayest freely boast
Thou hast given a peerless toast."

Though now and then well enough to walk out in the sunshine, or visit a neighbour, Burns was no longer able to do his duties in the Excise. Stobie kindly undertook to perform them for him, else the

Poet might have starved; for it is the rule—and a cruel and unjust one—in the Customs, to give but half-pay to the sick or those unable to work. When the birth-day of the king came, his friend Mrs. Riddel, desirous of soothing or pleasing him, requested him to accompany her to the assembly held in the evening, and shew his loyalty.—"I am," said he, "in such miserable health, as to be incapable of shewing my loyalty in any way. Racked as I am with rheumatism, I meet every face with a greeting like that of Balak to Balaam,—'Come curse me Jacob; and come defy me Israel.' So say I; come curse me that east wind, and come defy me the north. Would you have me, in such circumstances, copy you out a love-song. I will not be at the ball. Why should I? Man delights not me, nor woman neither. Can you supply me with the song, 'Let us all be unhappy together;' do so, and oblige *le pauvre* miserable Robert Burns."

Well or ill, his heart was still with the muse. He began to feel that he was soon to pass from among the living, and became solicitous about his fame.—"I have no copies of the songs I sent you," he says to Thomson, "and I have taken a fancy to review them all, and possibly may mend some of them; so, when you have complete leisure, I will thank you for the originals, or copies. I had rather be the author of five well-written songs than of ten otherwise." This request refers to those lyrics hitherto unpublished, of which Thomson had nearly fifty; it is needless to say that this revisal the poet did not live to perform.

To Johnson, proprietor of the Museum, Burns wrote on the 4th of July,—"You may probably think that for some time past I have neglected you and your work; but, alas! the hand of pain, and sorrow, and care has these many months lain heavy upon me. Personal and domestic affliction have almost entirely banished that alacrity and life with which I used to woo the rural muse of Scotia. Many a merry meeting this publication has given us, and possibly it may give us more —though, alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow-consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt not, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well nigh reached his middle career, and will turn over the poet to far other and more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit or the pathos of sentiment. However, hope is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it as well as I can." His sun of life was descending to the setting.

The summer warmth wrought no change on his [illegible]ering frame; and he was advised, about the close of June, to go into the country. I believe Burns followed his own feelings rather than the counsel of his physician, when he took up his residence at a lonely place called The Brow, on the shore of Solway in Annandale, resolved to try the effects of bathing in the sea—a remedy recommended in almost all cases by our rustic doctors. It happened at that time that Mrs. Riddel was residing near The Brow: she was herself ailing. On hearing of the Poet's arrival, she invited him to din-

ner, and sent her carriage for him to the cottage where he lodged, as he was unable to walk.

"I was struck," said she, "with his appearance on entering the room: the stamp of death was impressed on his features. His first words were, 'Well, madam, have you any commands for the other world?' I replied, that it seemed a doubtful case which of us should be there soonest. He looked in my face with an air of great kindness, and expressed his concern at seeing me so ill with his usual sensibility. At table he ate little or nothing. We had a long conversation about his present state, and the approaching termination of all his earthly prospects. He spoke of his death with firmness as well as feeling, as an event likely to happen very soon, and which gave him concern chiefly from leaving his four children so young and unprotected, and his wife in the hourly expectation of lying-in of a fifth. He shewed great concern about the care of his literary fame, and particularly the publication of his posthumous works. He said he was well aware that his death would occasion some noise, and that every scrap of his writing would be revived against him, to the injury of his future reputation; that letters and verses, written with unguarded freedom, would be handed about by vanity or malevolence, when no dread of his resentment would restrain them, or prevent malice or envy from pouring forth their venom on his name. The conversation was kept up with great evenness and animation on his side. I had seldom seen his mind greater, or more collected. There was frequently a considerable degree of vivacity in his sallies, and they would

probably have had a greater share had not the concern and dejection I could not disguise damped the spirit of pleasantry he seemed willing to indulge. We parted about sun-set on the evening of the 5th of July; the next day I saw him again, and we parted to meet no more."

With how little advantage to his health he bathed in the Solway, may be gathered from his letter to Cunningham of the 7th of July.—"Alas! my friend, I fear the voice of the Bard will soon be heard among you no more. For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bedfast and sometimes not; but these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism, which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You would actually not know me if you saw me. Pale, emaciated, and so feeble as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled—fled—but I can no more on this subject. I beg you to use your utmost interest, and that of all your friends, to move our Commissioners of Excise to grant me my full salary. If they do not grant it, I must lay my account with an exit truly *en poëte*—if I die not of disease, I must perish with hunger." The Excise refused this last humble boon.

On the 10th of July, he thus writes to his brother Gilbert:—"It will be no very pleasing news to you to be told that I am dangerously ill, and not likely to get better. An inveterate rheumatism has reduced me to such a state of debility, and my appetite is so totally gone, that I can scarcely stand on my legs. God keep my wife and children! If I am taken from their

head, they will be poor indeed. Remember me to my mother." To his wife he writes,—"No flesh nor fish can I swallow; porridge and milk are the only things I can taste. I am very happy to hear by Miss Jessie Lewars that you are all well. My very best compliments to her, and to all the children. I will see you on Sunday. Your affectionate husband, ROBERT BURNS." He likewise wrote to James Armour of Mauchline, his father-in-law, saying that his dear wife was nigh her confinement; that his own days were numbered, for he felt himself dying, and requesting that Mrs. Armour might hasten to Dumfries, to speak and look comfort to them.

Burns had formerly, when his hopes were higher and his health good, made it almost a quarrel with Thomson that he had sent him five pounds in acknowledgment of his songs. His situation, in all respects, was changed now: he had to bend his proud heart to beg from the Excise the continuance of his pay; and he had to lay himself under obligations to Stobie, who generously performed his duties gratis. He had no money in his pocket, and scarcely any food in his house; and, to aggravate these evils, one Williamson, to whom he owed the price of the cloth of his volunteer regimentals, threatened to sue him for the amount. The Poet was alarmed at this; and on the 12th of July wrote to Thomson, saying, "After all my boasted independence, curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am

dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me in gaol. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness; but the horrors of a gaol have made me half-distracted." To render this very modest request more acceptable, the Poet, ill as he was, tried his hand on the air of "Rothemurche;" and, allowing his mind to wander to scenes of former happiness, and to one whom he had loved, composed the last song he was to measure in this world, beginning, "Fairest maid on Devon banks." It is written in a character indicating the feeble state of his bodily strength.

Thomson instantly complied with the request of Burns: he borrowed a five-pound note from Cunningham, and sent it, saying he had made up his mind to enclose the identical sum the Poet had asked for when he received his letter. For this he has been sharply censured; and his defence is, that he was afraid of offending the pride of the Poet, who was uncommonly sensitive in pecuniary matters. A better defence is Thomson's own poverty; only one volume of his splendid work was then published; his outlay had been beyond his means, and very small sums of money had come in to cover his large expenditure. Had he been richer, his defence would have been a difficult matter. When Burns made the stipulation, his hopes were high, and the dread of hunger, or of the gaol, was far from his thoughts: he imagined that it became genius to refuse money in a work of national importance. But his situation grew gloomier as he wrote; he had lost

nearly his all in Ellisland, and was obliged to borrow small sums, which he found a difficulty in repaying. That he was in poor circumstances was well known to the world; and, had money been at Thomson's disposal, a way might have been found of doing the Poet good by stealth: he sent five pounds, because he could not send ten; and it would have saved him from some sarcastic remarks, and some pangs of heart, had he said so at once.

On the same day that Burns wrote to Thomson he also wrote to Mrs. Dunlop, and to his cousin, James Burness of Montrose. To the latter he said, "A rascal of a haberdasher believes that I am dying, and will infallibly put my emaciated body in gaol. Will you be so good as accommodate me, and that by return of post, with ten pounds? O, James, did you know the pride of my heart, you would feel doubly for me. Alas! I am not used to beg. O, do not disappoint me—save me from the horrors of a gaol." To Mrs. Dunlop he said, "I have written to you so often without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that 'bourne whence no traveller returns.' Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul; your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell."

These are supposed, by some, to be the last words which he wrote: there are yet later, and of higher import and meaning. As the day of life darkened down, Burns began to prepare for the change: he remembered that he had written many matters, both in verse and prose, of a nature licentious as well as witty. He sought to reclaim them, and in some instances succeeded; he had, when his increasing difficulties were rumoured about, received an offer for them from a bookseller; but he spurned at fifty pounds in comparison of his fair fame, and refused to sell or sanction them. That such things were scattered abroad troubled him greatly; he reflected that the mean and the malignant might rake them together; and, quoting them against him, triumph o'er his fame, and trample on his dust. Perhaps he felt some consolation in believing that his other works transcended these so far in talent and in number, that the grosser would be weighed down, cast aside, and forgotten. What troubled him most was the imputations of disloyalty to his country which had been thrown upon his character: he trembled lest he should be represented as one who desired to purchase republican license at the price of foreign invasion. He had defended his character and motives in a letter, uncommonly manly and eloquent, to Erskine of Mar; but he had requested it to be burnt, and was not aware that it was fortunately preserved. He still retained the letter on his memory, and it was the last act of his pen to write it out fair, and with comments, into his memorandum-book. Burns thus gave his delibe-

rate—I might say dying sanction, to that important letter; it makes statements which cover the Board of Excise and the British government of that day with eternal shame, and contains sentiments honourable to the head and heart of the Poet—such as should live in the bosom of every Briton.

"You have been misinformed," says the Poet, "as to my final dismission from the Excise—I am still in the service. Indeed, but for the exertions of Mr. Grahame of Fintray, who has ever been my warm and generous friend, I had, without so much as a hearing, or the slightest previous intimation, been turned adrift, with my helpless family, to all the horrors of want. In my defence to their accusations, I said, that whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, as to Britain I abjured the idea; that a constitution, which, in its original principles, experience had proved to be every way fitted for our happiness in society, it would be insanity to sacrifice to an untried visionary theory;—that, in consideration of my being situated in a department, however humble, immediately in the hands of people in power, I had forborne taking an active part, either personally or as an author, in the present business of reform; but that, where I must declare my sentiments, I would say there existed a system of corruption between the executive power and the representative part of the legislature which boded no good to our glorious constitution, and which every patriotic Briton must wish to see amended. My last remark gave great offence, and Mr. Corbet was instructed to inquire on the spot,

and to document me—'That my business was to act, *not to think*.'" A nobleman connected with the Pitt administration, to whom I repeated these last words, smiled bitterly and said—"They are as absurd as they are cruel."

Having removed the veil of mystery which hung too long over this transaction, and established himself as a lover of his country with all who know what patriotism is, Burns proceeds to discuss his hopes of fame, and his character as a man and a poet.—"The partiality of my countrymen," he observes, "has brought me forward as a man of genius, and has given me a character to support. In the poet I have avowed manly and independent sentiments which, I trust, will be found in the man. My honest fame is my dearest concern, and a thousand times I have trembled at the idea of those degrading epithets that malice or misrepresentation may affix to my name. I have often, in blasting anticipation, listened to some future hackney scribbler, with the heavy malice of stupidity exulting in his hireling paragraphs. 'Burns, notwithstanding the fanfaronade of independence to be found in his works, and after having been held forth to public view and to public estimation as a man of some genius, yet, quite destitute of resources within himself to support his borrowed dignity, dwindled into a paltry exciseman, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the vilest of mankind.'—In your hands, sir, permit me to lodge my disavowal and defiance of the slanderous falsehood. Burns was a poor man by birth, and an ex-

ciseman by necessity; but I *will* say it—the sterling of his honest worth no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind oppression might bend, but could not subdue." These sentiments need no comment: in them we hear the voice of the Poet speaking from the grave, desiring justice rather than mercy.

Sea-bathing relieved for awhile the pains in the Poet's limbs; but his appetite failed; he was oppressed with melancholy; he looked ruefully forward, and saw misery and ruin ready to swallow his helpless household up. Burns grew feverish on the 14th of July; felt himself sinking, and longed to be at home. He returned on the 18th, in a small spring cart; the ascent to his house was steep, and the cart stopped at the foot of the Mill-hole-brae; when he alighted he shook much and stood with difficulty; he seemed unable to stand upright. He stooped, as if in pain, and walked tottering towards his own door: his looks were hollow and ghastly, and those who saw him then never expected to see him in life again.

It was soon spread through Dumfries that had returned from The Brow much worse th he went away, and it was added that he was The anxiety of the people, high and low, was very great. I was present and saw it. Wherever two or three were together their talk was of Burns, and of him alone. They spoke of his history, of his person, and of his works—of his witty sayings and sarcastic replies, and of his too early fate, with much enthusiasm, and sometimes with deep feeling. All that

he had done, and all that they had hoped he would accomplish, were talked of: half-a-dozen of them stopped Dr. Maxwell in the street, and said, "How is Burns, sir?" He shook his head, saying, "he cannot be worse," and passed on to be subjected to similar inquiries farther up the way. I heard one of a groupe inquire, with much simplicity, "Who do you think will be our poet now?"

Though Burns now knew he was dying, his good humour was unruffled, and his wit never forsook him. When he looked up and saw Dr. Maxwell at his bed-side,—"Alas!" he said, "what has brought you here? I am but a poor crow, and not worth plucking." He pointed to his pistols, took them in his hand, and gave them to Maxwell, saying they could not be in worthier keeping, and he should never more have need of them. This relieved his proud heart from a sense of obligation. Soon afterwards he saw Gibson, one of his brother-volunteers, by the bed-side with tears in his eyes. He smiled and said,—"John, don't let the awkward squad fire over me."

His little household presented a melancholy spectacle; the Poet dying; his wife in hourly expectation of being confined; four helpless children wandering from room to room, gazing on their miserable parents, and little of food or cordial kind to pacify the whole or soothe the sick. To Jessie Lewars, all who are charmed with the Poet's works are much indebted: she acted with the prudence of a sister and the tenderness of a daughter, and kept desolation away, though she could not keep disease.—"A tremor," says Maxwell, "pervaded his frame; his

tongue, though often refreshed, became parched; and his mind, when not roused by conversation, sunk into delirium. On the second and third day after his return from The Brow, the fever increased and his strength diminished. On the fourth day, when his attendant held a cordial to his lips, he swallowed it eagerly—rose almost wholly up—spread out his hands—sprang forward nigh the whole length of the bed—fell on his face and expired. He was thirty-seven years and seven months old, and of a form and strength which promised long life; but the great and inspired are often cut down in youth, while

"Villains ripen gray with time."

His interment took place on the 25th of July; nor should it be forgotten, in relating the Poet's melancholy story, that, while his body was borne along the street, his widow was taken in labour and deliver of a son, who survived his birth but a short whi The leading men of the town and neighbourho appeared as mourners; the streets were lined by the Angushire Fencibles and the Cinque Ports Cavalry, and his body was borne by the Volunteers to the old kirk-yard, with military honours. The multitude who followed amounted to many thousands. It was an impressive and a mournful sight; all was orderly and decorous. The measured steps, the military array, the colours displayed, and the muffled drum—I thought then, and think now—had no connexion with a Pastoral Bard. I mingled with the mourners. On reaching the grave into which the Poet's body was about to descend, there was a pause among them, as if loth to part with his

remains; and when the first shovel-full of earth sounded on the coffin-lid, I looked up, and saw tears on many cheeks where tears were not usual. The Volunteers justified the surmise of Burns by three ragged and straggling vollies; the earth was heaped up, and the vast multitude melted silently away.

The body of Burns was not, however, to remain long in its place. To suit the plan of a rather showy mausoleum, his remains were removed into a more commodious spot of the same kirk-yard, on the 5th of June, 1815. The coffin was partly dissolved away; but the dark curling locks of the Poet were as glossy, and seemed as fresh, as on the day of his death. In the interior of the structure stands a marble monument, embodying, with little skill or grace, that well-known passage in the dedication to the gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt:—"The poetic Genius of my country found me, as the prophetic bard Elijah did Elisha—at the plough; and threw her inspiring mantle over me."—Nor is the indifferent sculpture redeemed by the inscription. The merits of him who wrote "Tam O' Shanter," and "The Cottar's Saturday Night," are concealed in Latin. Here, as to a shrine, flock annually vast numbers of pilgrims; many, very many, are from America; not a few from France and Germany; and the list-book contains the names of the most eminent men of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Thus lived and died Robert Burns, the chief of Scottish Poets. He seems to have been created shew how little classic lore is required for the

piest flights of the muse—how dangerous to domestic peace burning passions and touchy sensibilities are—and how divinely a man may be inspired, without gaining bread or acquiring importance, in the land his genius adorns.

Burns, in his youth, was tall and sinewy, with coarse swarthy features, and a ready word of wit or of kindness for all. The man differed little from the lad; his form was vigorous, his limbs shapely, his knees firmly knit, his arms muscular and round, his hands large, his fingers long, and he stood five feet ten inches high. All his movements were unconstrained and free:—he had a slight stoop of the neck, betokening a holder of the plough; and a lock or so of his dark waving hair was tied carelessly behind with two casts of narrow black ribbon. His looks beamed with genius and intelligence; his forehead was broad and clear, shaded by raven locks inclining to curl; his cheeks were furrowed more with anxiety than time; his nose was short rather than long; his mouth, firm and manly; his teeth, white and regular; and there was a dimple, a small one, on his chin. His eyes were large, dark, and lustrous; I have heard them likened to coach-lamps approaching in a dark night, because they were first seen of any part of the Poet.—"I never saw," said Scott, "such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time." In his ordinary moods, Burns looked a man of a hundred; but when animated in company, he was a man of a million; his swarthy features glowed; his eyes kindled up till they all but lightened; his ploughman

stoop vanished; and his voice—deep, manly, and musical—added its sorcery of pathos or of wit, till the dullest owned the enchantments of genius.

His personal strength was united to great activity; he could move a twenty-stone sack of meal without much apparent effort, and load a cart with bags of corn in the time, one of his neighbours said, that other men were talking about it. A mason was hewing him a stone for a cheese-press, and Burns took pleasure as a side was squared to turn over the huge mass unaided. A large pebble is still pointed out at Ellisland, as his putting-stone; and though no living man in Nithsdale perhaps can poise it in the air, the tradition proves the popular belief in his great strength. He delighted in feats of rural activity and skill; he loved to draw the straightest furrow on his fields, to sow the largest quantity of seed-corn of any farmer in the dale in a day, mow the most rye-grass and clover in ten hours of exertion, and stook to the greatest number of reapers. In this he sometimes met with his match. After a hard strife, on the harvest field, with a fellow-husbandman, in which the Poet was equalled:—"Robert," said his rival, "I'm no sae far behind this time, I'm thinking?" —"John," said he in a whisper, "you're behind in something yet—I made a sang while I was stooking!" —I have heard my father say, that Burns had the handsomest cast of the hand in sowing corn he ever saw on a furrowed field.

Burns desired as much to excel in conversation as he did in these fits and starts of husbandry; but he was more disposed to contend for victory than to

seek for knowledge. The debating club of Tarbolton was ever strong within him ; a fierce lampoon or a rough epigram was often the reward of those who ventured to contradict him. His conversation partook of the nature of controversy, and he urged his opinions with a vehemence amounting to fierceness. All this was natural enough when he was involved in argument with the boors around him ; but he was disposed, when pressed in debate, to be equally discourteous and unsparing to the polite and the titled.

In the company of men of talent he was another man ; he was then among his peers, and listened with attention, and spoke with a modest eloquence which surprised many.—" I think Burns," said Robertson the historian to Professor Christieson, " was one of the most extraordinary men I ever met with ; his poetry surprised me very much, his prose surprised me still more, and his conversation surprised me more than both his poetry and prose."—" His address," says Robert Riddell, " was pleasing ; he was neither forward nor embarrassed in manner ; his spirits were generally high, and his conversation animated. His language was fluent, frequently fine ; his enunciation always rapid ; his ideas clear and vigorous, and he had the rare power of modulating his peculiarly fine voice, so as to harmonize with whatever subject he touched upon. I have heard him talk with astonishing rapidity, nor miss the articulation of a single syllable ; elevate and depress his voice as the topic seemed to require : and sometimes, when the subject was pathetic, he would prolong the

words in the most impressive and affecting manner, indicative of the deep sensibility which inspired him. He often lamented to me that fortune had not placed him at the bar or in the senate; he had great ambition, and the feeling that he could not gratify it preyed upon him severely."

In the morning of life, Burns met lords with awe and embarrassment; in the afternoon of existence, he encountered them with suspicion or scorn. Those who named a lord, or alluded to a person of rank in his company, were instantly crushed in an epigram, or insulted by some sarcastic sally. The conduct of the Scottish aristocracy had sunk to his heart, and the neglect of the Pitt administration was seldom away from his fancy. The more he saw of the world, and the more he reflected, these unwelcome thoughts pressed the more upon him. He could not but know that the high-born and the well-connected prospered: that thousands le s worthy than himself were fattening on posts and pensions, and elbowing the sons of genius out of what he reckoned their patrimony; he had also been made to feel his dependence, in that insulting mandate from the Board of Excise, that his duty was "to act, and not to think." It is true that his dislike might have been expressed with more courtesy, and his wit might have had less ferocity, with equal keenness of point. Yet, when he proposed to drink the health of Washington instead of Pitt, it was less a matter of ill-breeding, or republican feeling, than a burst of anger: he considered the Premier as one of his oppressors— and perhaps the want of courtesy belonged to him

who invited the Poet to dinner, and greeted him with this unwelcome toast.

In the company of ladies, Burns was quite another being: for them he calmed down his impetuous temper, and allowed all that was winning in his nature to shine out. He was fierce as Moloch among men; among women he was a Belial, soft, insinuating and eloquent: his eyes, which before sparkled like those of the serpent, became meek like those of the dove: the love of contradiction died within him, and he courted his way to their hearts and their understandings at the same time. In this his letters differ widely from his conversation: the presence of beauty inspired him; when it was no longer before him he seems to hunt for thoughts and hesitate for words, and, amid much natural emotion, is affected and cumbrous. Nothing more untrue was ever uttered than that his female patronesses shrunk from the vehement familiarity of his admiration; there is no proof to be found of this: Margaret Chalmers, indeed, scrupled to have a song published in her praise: and Miss Alexander chose to resent by her silence the song of the "Lass of Ballochmyle;" but there is no instance of ladies shrinking from the audacity of his admiration. His most constant correspondents were ladies of birth and talent; the ladies of the north, much to their honour, sympathized with their Poet to his last; and the day after he was buried some of the proudest dames of Dumfrieshire shed tears as they scattered flowers over his grave. In truth, he did not express the rapture of an enamoured peasant, as Jeffrey assures us he did, but

the admiration of a man: he preferred the good-ing of nature to the iced civilities of polished life; he did not, indeed, think that woman was to be worshipped according to the fantastic rules of chivalry; but when she spoke, he listened; when she sang, he seemed to become intoxicated with the sound; and when she played on an instrument, he neither heard nor saw ought else save herself and her music.

To the opinions of the world Burns paid too little deference; whatever he felt he said, and what he said often glanced sharply on religion and on politics. He attacked the fiery zeal of sundry churchmen—it was called an attack on religion; he attacked the pride and presumption of the titled—it was called envy and arrogance: he wished for more wealth among the poor, and more humility among the rich—and was branded as a disturber of the public peace; and he desired to see the principles of the revolution of 1688 carried into effect with less corruption in the high places—and was called a jacobin, and ordered to be silent.

What he was with the world at large, so was he with man in particular; he had no medium in his hatred or his love; he never spared the dull, as if they were not to be endured because he was himself bright; wealth he was inclined to visit as a fault on the possessor. When in the company of the demure and the pious, he loved to start doubts in religion, which he knew nothing short of inspiration could solve; and to speak of Calvinism with such latitude of language as shocked or vexed all listeners, and

caused him to be regarded by some as a freethinker or a deist. In his own household he was another man: he was an affectionate husband and a dutiful father; he loved to teach his boys their duty to God and to their neighbour. To Mrs. Haugh—a most respectable woman—in whose house he lived in the Bank-Vennel, and who was much with him during his long illness—he lamented that he had sometimes doubted the truths of scripture: he found them to be his consolation at last.

I have no wish to shut my eyes on the follies of the Poet; they have darkened other narratives than mine. The memoir of Heron, the criticism of Jeffrey, and the communications of Syme have gone widely abroad. With the first, Burns is a coarse libertine; with the second, a careless drunkard, who starved his wife and children; while the third describes him as rough and fierce, and inclined to stab the friend who hazarded good advice. Of the feelings of Heron, it is sufficient to say that he penned his depreciating memoir to meet the subscription for the Poet's widow and children: of the opinion of Jeffrey, I may safely assert that he has judged amiss; and with regard to the account of Syme, I can only imagine that it originated in some mistake on the part of him of Ryedale:—to suppose Burns serious, contradicts all the rest of his life. Of Heron, the Poet must have thought when he said,—"I have often, in blasting anticipation, listened to some future hackney scribbler with the heavy malice of savage stupidity exulting in his hireling paragraphs."

Burns was no tippler; he loved the excitement of company, and to see the bottle circulate ; to others, as well as to him,

"Every new cork was a new spring of joy."

Nor did he know always when to retire from these social excesses; good fellowship was as a spell upon him. His own heart, always too open, was then laid bare. He watched the characters of men ; he gladdened the clever by the sallies of his fancy, stimulated the dull by his wit, and imagined that he was strengthening the ties of friendship, and that

"The bands grew the tighter the more they were wet."

No doubt, later in life he desired to escape from uneasy reflections—from thinking of ruined hopes and humbled ambition, and, seeking consolation in company, took an angel of darkness to his heart rather than one of light. I am assured by Mrs. Haugh, who knew him well to the last, that Burns drank from circumstances rather than inclination. An angel from heaven, she said, could scarcely have escaped corruption in his situation ; he was constantly invited, nay, sometimes almost literally dragged into company.' Her husband now and then, as he went out by day-light in the morning to his work, met Burns coming home. The Poet never passed him without a word or two, expressing his sorrow for the life he was leading—such as, "O, Mr. Haugh, you are a happy man ; you have risen from a refreshing sleep, and left a kind wife and children,

while I am returning a poor self-condemned wretch to mine." At whatever hour he came home, or in whatever condition he returned, he always spoke kindly to his wife; reproachful words were never heard between them. He was a stedfast friend and a good neighbour, ready with his hands and willing to oblige: while he lived in Ellisland, few passed his door without being cheered by his wit or treated at his table.

Of women and their fascinations he loved to talk freely and wildly; the witchery of his conversation, and the magic of his songs, were too powerful for the resolution of some; but his errors in this way have been seriously exaggerated. Those who were unacquainted with the freedoms of the muse beheld him making love in every song he wrote; and young spinsters

"Coost their heads fu' hiegh,"

when they saw their charms reflected in the bright verses of the Bard, and suspected their own fortitude. Some were less timid: one intrepid young lady said she desired the Poet's acquaintance of all things, and intimated the time and place where he might meet her. He took a way which did not always succeed of scaring such impertinents.—"It is scarcely modest in a fine young woman," was his reply, "to seek the acquaintance of one whose character is considered so bad." To a lively landlady in Dumfries, whose ale-firkins were to be examined, he said,—"Who will go down to the cellar with me till I gauge the browst?"—"I'll go down with you my-

self, Mr. Burns," she replied. He turned round on her, and, with a peculiar glance, said,—" O, woman, strong is thy faith!" Stories of this complexion, oftener for than against him, might be multiplied:—

> " Between two maids, who hath the merriest eye
> He had, indeed, no shallow spirit of judgment."

The political heresies of the Poet are more easily dealt with. He knew that he was created with high powers of mind; he was conscious not only of his superiority to the peasants around, but to men of high title and of long descent, and felt himself defrauded of the station nature intended him to fill in society:—this is visible in almost all he writes. He can justify the ways of God to man, but he cannot justify the ways of man to God; he feels that heaven makes nothing hereditary—neither beauty, taste, nor talent; and he is grieved to see men insult the great laws of nature, and form institutions contradicting God's divine system. This is the sentiment which inspires that noble lyric, " A man's a man for a' that;" and it was this feeling which made him sad and desponding—which induced him to seek consolation in the shadowy images of republics, and hail with so much rapture the dawn of a liberty which promised the empire of the earth to the worth and the genius which it produced. That Pitt did not feel truly, or weigh worthily, the genius and sentiments of the " meteor of the north," as the Poet was idly called, seems perfectly clear. When reminded of his claims by Henry Addington, he

pushed the bottle to Lord Melville, and did nothing; his own days were shortened by disappointed hopes and crushed ambition. Had a situation worthy of the genius of Burns been bestowed on him, this tale had neither been so dark nor so sorrowful—he would not have perished like a caged eagle, denied the full use of its wings and the free range of its cloud-capt mountains.

Of his modes of study and habits of life much has already been said; something more can be added. He has told us how he delighted in the rushing of the storm through the leafless woods; how he rejoiced in the out-gushing of the flowers in spring, in the song of the birds and the melody of running waters. In stormy nights he has been known to rise from good company and a well-furnished table, to gaze on the tumultuous clouds, mark the vivid lightnings, and hearken the pealing thunder. He loved, while in his farm, to stand on the scaur, and, when Nith was in flood, look at the red torrent bursting from the Bankhead-wood against Dalswinton holm, and, flung back again by the bridling embankment, flashing and foaming from side to side, making the ashes and alders of the bank quiver and quake. His favourite spot of study lies between Ellisland onstead and the Isle—where the uplands descend by the water side to the holm. Here the neighbouring gentry love to walk, and peasants to assemblé: the Poet's widow and several ladies from the west of Scotland lately dined on the place—as sacred to the memory of his musings.

When he lived in Dumfries he had three favourite walks—on the dock-green by the river side—among the ruins of Lincluden College, and—towards the Martingdon-Ford on the north side of the Nith. This latter place was secluded, commanded a view of the distant hills and the romantic towers of Lincluden, and afforded soft greensward banks to rest upon, and the sight and sound of the stream:—here he composed many of his finest songs. As soon as he was heard to hum to himself his wife saw that he had something in his mind, and was quite prepared to see him snatch up his hat and set silently off for his musing ground. When by himself and in the open air, his ideas arranged themselves in their natural order, words came at will and he seldom returned without having finished a song. In case of interruption, he set about completing it at the fire-side; he balanced himself on the hind-legs of his arm-chair, and rocking to and fro continued to hum the tune, and seldom failed of success. When the verses were finished, he passed them through the ordeal of Mrs. Burns' voice; listened attentively while she sung; asked her if any of the words were difficult, and when one happened to be too rough he readily found a smoother—but he never, save at the resolute entreaty of a scientific musician, sacrificed sense to sound. The autumn was his favourite season, and the twilight his favourite hour of study.

As a farmer and an exciseman he did his duty, and he did little more. He was laborious by fits, and

attentive by starts; he tilled the ground and protected the revenue, but he wrought without hope in the one, and without heart in the other. He endeavoured to make his farm yield the rent by butter and by cheese, as well as by corn; and as this required female hands, he confided it mostly to the management of his wife and maid-servants. But Ellisland is naturally fitter for corn than for grass; the greensward was far from so luxuriant as that of the milk and butter districts of Cunningham and Kyle; nor was his wife sufficiently intimate with the management of cows and the guidance of a dairy. The plan of Burns to unite, in his own person, the poet, the exciseman, and the farmer was poetic, and failed as much from miscalculation as mismanagement. His duties in the Excise he performed with strict punctuality; he was afraid of being reckoned negligent, and was always at his post. He kept his books in excellent order.—"Bring me Burns's books," said Maxwell of Terraughty, a rigid and determined magistrate; "it always does me good to see them—they shew me that a warm kind-hearted man may be a diligent and honest officer." He was not a bustling active gauger, nor did he love to put himself foremost in adventures which he knew would end in distress to many. One clear moonlight morning, on being awakened by the clang of horses at a gallop, he started up, looked out at the window, and to his wife, who asked eagerly what it was, he whispered, "It is smugglers, Jean." —"Robert, then I fear ye'll be to follow them?"

she said—"And so I would," he answered, "were it Will Gunnion or Edgar Wright; but it's poor Brandyburn, who has a wife and three weans, and is no doing owre weel in his farm. What can I do?" She pulled him from the window. Many anecdotes of this kind might be told.

Of his quick wit and caustic keenness of remark I have already given instances: more are in circulation both in prose and verse. It is much, however, to be regretted that his sallies, where sentiment unites with gaiety, have frequently escaped, as matters too light and elusive, from the public mind; while sayings and retorts—sharp, personal, or profane—have remained. I shall relate a few, that nothing on which his spirit is impressed may be lost. He disliked puns, and was seldom civil to those who uttered them.—"After all, a pun is an innocent thing," said one of his companions.—"Innocent?" said Burns; "no, sir; it is committing 'a deed without a name' with the language." He disliked to hear great people talked about more than they deserved. One who was in his company kept saying the Earl of such a place said this, and Duke so-and-so said that.—"Have done, sir!" exclaimed the Poet; "you are stopping our mouths by a royal proclamation." He loved praise—and loved it not the less when it came from the lips of an accomplished lady.—"Madam," said he to Mrs. M'Murdo, "your praise has ballooned me up Parnassus."—"My merit is not all my own," he said to Robert Aiken of Ayr, "for you have read me into re-

putation." He called once on a certain lord in Edinburgh, and was shewn into the library. To amuse himself till his lordship was at leisure, he took down a volume of Shakspeare splendidly bound, and on opening it discovered, from the gilding, that it had never been read; also, that the worms were eating it through and through. Some dozen years afterwards, another visitor took down the same volume, and found the following lines pencilled by Burns on the first page:—

> "Through and through the inspired leaves
> Ye maggots make your windings;
> But, oh! respect his lordship's taste,
> And spare his golden bindings."

Burns paid little deference to the artificial distinctions of society. On his way to Leith one morning, he met a man in hoddin-gray—a west-country farmer; he shook him earnestly by the hand, and stopt and conversed with him. All this was seen by a young Edinburgh blood, who took the poet roundly to task for this defect of taste. —"Why, you fantastic gomeral," said Burns, "it was not the gray coat, the scone-bonnet, and the Sanquhar boot-hose I spoke to, but the man that was in them; and the man, sir, for true worth, would weigh you and me, and ten more such, down any day." His discernment was great: when Scott was quite a lad he caught the notice of the Poet, by naming the author of some verses describing a soldier lying dead on the snow. Burns regarded the future minstrel with sparkling eyes, and said, "Young man, you have begun to consider these

things early." He paused on seeing Scott's flushing face—shook him by the hand, saying in a deep tone, "This boy will be heard of yet."

Speaking one day of his own poetry, Burns said, "I have much to answer for: my success in rhyme has produced a shoal of ill-spawned monsters who imagine, because they make words clink, they are poets. It requires a will-o'-wisp to pass over the quicksands and quagmires of the Scottish dialect. I am spunkie—they follow me, and sink." To one who was frugal of his wine at table, and who was standing holding up a fresh bottle, saying, "Do allow me to draw this one cork more; I ask it as a favour."—"Sir," said Burns, "you hold the screw over the cork like Abraham holding the knife above his son Isaac—make the sacrifice!" On hearing a gentleman sneering at the Solemn League and Covenant, and calling it ridiculous and fanatical, the Poet eyed him across the table, and exclaimed,

"The Solemn League and Covenant
Cost Scotland blood—cost Scotland tears—
But it sealed Freedom's sacred cause;—
If thou'rt a slave, indulge thy sneers."

Of the farm of Ellisland, when some one said it was good ground, Burns answered, "And so it is, save what is stones. It is not land, sir; it is the riddlings of the creation!" While at Moffat once with Clarke the composer, the Poet called for a bumper of brandy.—"Oh, not a bumper," said the musician—"I prefer two small glasses."—"Two glasses?" cried Burns, "why, you are like the lass in Kyle, who said she would rather be kissed twice bareheaded

than once with her bonnet on." At the table of Maxwell of Terraughty, when one of the guests chose to talk of the dukes and earls with whom he had drank or dined, Burns silenced him with an epigram :—

"What of earls with whom you have supt,
And of dukes that you dined with yestreen ?
Lord ! a louse, sir, is still but a louse,
Though it crawl on the curls of a queen."

On one occasion, being storm-stayed at Lamington in Clydesdale, he went to church, but was so little pleased with the preacher and the place, that he left a poetic record on the church-window against them :

"As cauld a wind as ever blew,
A caulder kirk, and in't but few ;
As cauld a minister's e'er spak,
Ye'se a' be het ere I come back."

"I dined with Burns," said Mrs. Montagu, "at Arbigland : he was witty ; drank as others drank ; and was long in coming to the tea-table. It was then the fashion for young ladies to be busy about something—I was working a flower. The Poet sat down beside me, talked of the beauty of what I was imitating, and put his hand so near the work, that I said, "Well, take it, and do a bit yourself."—"O, ho !" said he, "you think my hand is unsteady with wine. I cannot work a flower, madam ; but—" he pulled the thread out of the needle, and re-threaded it in a moment—"can a tipsy man do that ?" He talked to me of his children, more particularly of his eldest son, and called him a promising boy—"And yet, madam," he said, with a sarcastic glance of his eye, "I hope he will turn out a glorious

blockhead, and so make his fortune." Burns assumed, as well he might, the title of Poet: he was none of those who insult the taste of their admirers by depreciating the merit of their own works: on one of his books, in my possession, there is written, in his own rough, free, manly hand, "Robert Burns, Poet;" an imitation of this is added to the admirable portrait. On the collar of a favourite dog he had the same words engraven.

As a poet, Burns stands in the first rank: his conceptions are original; his thoughts new and weighty; his manner unborrowed; and even his language is his own. He owes no honour to his subjects, for they are all of an ordinary kind, such as humble life around him presented: he sought neither in high station nor in history for matter to his muse, and yet all his topics are simple, natural, and to be found without research. The Scottish bards who preceded him selected subjects which obtained notice from their oddity, and treated them in a way singular and outré. The verses of the first and fifth James, as well as those of Ramsay and Fergusson, are chiefly a succession of odd and ludicrous pictures, as true as truth itself, and no more. To their graphic force of delineation Burns added sentiment and passion, and an elegant tenderness and simplicity. He took topics familiar to all; the Daisy grew on the lands he ploughed; the Mouse built her nest on his own stubble-field; the Haggis smoked on his own board; the Scotch Drink which he sung was distilled on the

banks of Doon; the Dogs that conversed so wittily and wisely were his own collies; Tam O'Shanter was a merry husbandman of his own acquaintance; and even the "De'il himsel" was familiar to all, and had often alarmed, by his eldritch croon and the marks of his cloven foot, the pastoral people of Kyle. Burns was the first who taught the world that in lowly subjects high poetry resided. Touched by him, they were lifted at once into the regions of inspiration. His spirit ascended into an humble topic, as the sap of spring ascends a tree to endow it with beauty and fragrance.

Burns is our chief national Poet; he owes nothing of the structure of his verse or of the materials of his poetry to other lands—he is the offspring of the soil; he is as natural to Scotland as the heath is to her hills, and all his brightness, like our nocturnal aurora, is of the north. Nor has he taken up fleeting themes; his song is not of the external manners and changeable affectations of man—it is of the human heart—of the mind's hopes and fears, and of the soul's aspirations. Others give us the outward form and pressure of society—the court-costume of human nature—the laced lapelle and the epauletted shoulder. He gives us flesh and blood; all he has he holds in common with mankind, yet all is national and Scottish. We can see to whom other bards have looked up for inspiration—like fruit of the finest sort, they smack of the stock on which they were grafted. Burns read Young, Thomson, Shenstone, and Shakspeare; yet there is nothing of Young, Thomson, Shenstone, or Shakspeare about him;

nor is there much of the old ballad. His light is of nature, like sunshine, and not reflected. When, in after-life, he tried imitation, his "Epistle to Grahame of Fintray" shewed satiric power and polish little inferior to Dryden.

He is not only the truest and best of Scottish Poets, but, in ease, fire, and passion, he is second to none save Shakspeare. I know of no one besides, whose verse flows forth so sparkling and spontaneous. On the lines of other bards, we see the marks of care and study—now and then they are happy, but they are as often elaborated out and brightened like a key by frequent handling. Burns is seldom or never so—he wrote from the impulse of nature—he wrote because his passions raged like so many demons till they got vent in rhyme. Others sit and solicit the muse, like a coy mistress, to be kind; she came to Burns "unsent for," like the "bonnie lass" in the song, and showered her favours freely. The strength was equal to the harmony; rugged westlin words were taken from the lips of the weaver and the ploughman, and adorned with melody and feeling; and familiar phrases were picked up from shepherds and mechanics, and rendered as musical as is Apollo's lute.—"I can think of no verse since Shakspeare's," said Pitt to Henry Addington, "which comes so sweetly and at once from nature. 'Out of the eater came forth meat:'"—the premier praised whom he starved. Burns was not a poet by fits and starts; the mercury of his genius stood always at the inspired point; like the fairy's drinking-cup, the fountain of his fancy

was ever flowing and ever full. He had, it is true, set times and seasons when the fruits of his mind were more than usually abundant; but the songs of spring were equal to those of summer—those of summer were not surpassed by those of autumn; the quantity might be different, the flavour and richness were ever the same.

His variety is equal to his originality. His humour, his gaiety, his tenderness, and his pathos come all in a breath; they come freely, for they come of their own accord; nor are they huddled together at random, like doves and crows in a flock; the contrast is never offensive; the comic slides easily into the serious, the serious into the tender, and the tender into the pathetic. The witch's cup, out of which the wondering rustic drank seven kinds of wine at once, was typical of the muse of Burns. It is this which has made him welcome to all readers.—"No poet," says Scott, "with the exception of Shakspeare, ever possessed the power of exciting the most varied and discordant emotions with such rapid transitions."

Notwithstanding the uncommon ease and natural elegance of his musings—the sweet and impassioned tone of his verse, critics have not been wanting who perceived in his works the humility of his origin. His poems, I remember well enough, were considered by many, at first, as the labours of some gentleman who assumed the rustic for the sake of indulging in satire; their knowledge was reckoned beyond the reach, and their flights above the power, of a simple ploughman. Something of this belief may

be seen in Mrs. Scott of Wauchope's letter; and when it was known for a truth that the author was a ploughman, many lengthy discussions took place concerning the way in which the Poet had acquired his knowledge. Ayr race-course was pointed out as the likely scene of his studies of high life, where he found what was graceful and elegant. When Jeffrey wrote his depreciating criticism, he forgot that Burns had studied politeness in the very school where he himself was polished :—

"I've been at drunken writers' feasts,"

claims a scholarship which the critic might have respected. If sharp epigrams, familiar gallantry, love of independence, and a leaning to the tumid be, as that critic assures us, true symptoms of vulgar birth, then Swift was a scavenger, Rochester a coalheaver, Pope a carman, and Thomson a boor. He might as well see lowness of origin in the James Stuart who wrote "Christ's Kirk on the green," as in the Robert Burns who wrote "Tam O' Shanter." The nature which Burns infused into all he wrote deals with internal emotions: feeling is no more vulgar in a ploughman than in a prince.

In all this I see the reluctance of an accomplished scholar to admit the merits of a rustic poet who not only claimed, but took, the best station on the Caledonian Parnassus. It could be no welcome sight to philosophers, historians, and critics to see a peasant, fragrant from the furrow, elbowing his way through their polished ranks to the highest place of honour, exclaiming,—

"What's a' your jargon o' your schools?"

Some of them were no doubt astonished and incensed; nature was doing too much: they avenged themselves by advising him to leave his vulgar or romantic fancies and grow classical. His best songs they called random flights; his happiest poems the fruit of a vagrant impulse; they accounted him an accident—"a wild colt of a comet"—a sort of splendid error: and refused to look upon him as a true poet, raised by the kindly warmth of nature; for they thought nothing beautiful which was not produced or adorned by learning.

Burns is a thorough Scotchman; his nationality, like cream on milk, floats on the surface of all his works; it mingles in his humour as well as in his tenderness; yet it is seldom or never offensive to an English ear; there is nothing narrow-souled in it. He rejoices in Scotland's ancient glory and in her present strength; he bestows his affection on her heathery mountains, as well as on her romantic vales; he glories in the worth of her husbandmen, and in the loveliness of her maidens. The brackeny glens and thistly brae-sides of the North are more welcome to his sight than are the sunny dales of Italy, fragrant with ungathered grapes; its men, if not quite divinities, are more than mortal; and the women are clothed in beauty, and walk in a light of their own creating; a haggis is food fit for gods; brose is a better sort of ambrosia; "wi' twopenny we fear nae evil;" and whiskey not only makes us insensible of danger, but inspires noble verse and heroic deeds. There is something at once ludicrous and dignified in all this:

to excite mingled emotions was the aim of the Poet. Besides a love of country, there is an intense love of freedom about him; not the savage joy in the boundless forest and the unlicensed range, but the calm determination and temperate delight of a reflecting mind. Burns is the bard of liberty—not that which sets fancy free and fetters the body; he resists oppression—he covets free thought and speech—he scorns slavish obedience to the mob as much as he detests tyranny in the rulers. He spoke out like a bold-inspired person; he knew his word would have weight with the world, and sung his "Man's a man for a' that," as a watch-word to future generations—as a spell against slavery.

The best poems of Burns are about rural and pastoral life, and relate the hopes, joys, and aspirations of that portion of the people falsely called the humble, as if grandeur of soul were a thing "born in the purple," and not the free gift and bounty of heaven. The passions and feelings of man are disguised, not changed, in polished society; flesh and blood are the same beneath hoddin' gray as beneath three-piled velvet. This was what Burns alluded to when he said he saw little in the splendid circles of Edinburgh which was new to him. His pictures of human life and of the world are of a mental as well as national kind. His "Twa Dogs" prove that happiness is not unequally diffused: "Scotch Drink" gives us fire-side enjoyments; the "Earnest Cry and Prayer" shows the keen eye which humble people cast on their rulers; the "Address to the Deil" indulges in religious humanities, in which sympathy

overcomes fear; "The Auld Mare," and "The Address to Maillie," enjoin, by the most simple and touching examples, kindness and mercy to dumb creatures; "The Holy Fair" desires to curb the licentiousness of those who seek amusement instead of holiness in religion; "Man was made to Mourn' exhorts the strong and the wealthy to be mindful of the weak and the poor; "Halloween" shows us superstition in a domestic aspect; "Tam O'Shanter" adorns popular belief with humorous terror, and helps us to laugh old dreads away; "The Mouse," in its weakness, contrasts with man in his strength, and preaches to us the instability of happiness on earth; while "The Mountain Daisy" pleads with such moral pathos the cause of the flowers of the field sent by God to adorn the earth for man's pleasure, that our feet have pressed less ungraciously on the "wee modest crimson-tipped flower," since his song was written.

Others of his poems have a still grander reach. "The Vision" reveals the Poet's plan of Providence, proves the worth of eloquence, bravery, honesty, and beauty, and that even the rustic bard himself is an useful and ornamental link in the great chain of being. "The Cottar's Saturday Night" connects us with the invisible world, and shows that domestic peace, faithful love, and patriotic feelings are of earthly things most akin to the joys of heaven; while the divine "Elegy on Mathew Henderson" unites human nature in a bond of sympathy with the stars of the sky, the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, the flowery vale, and the lonely mountain.

The hastiest of his effusions has a wise aim; and the eloquent Curran perceived this when he spoke of the "sublime morality of Burns."

Had Burns, in his poems, preached only so many moral sermons, his audience might have been a select, but it would have been a limited one. The sublimest truths, like the surest medicines, are sometimes uneasy to swallow: for this the Poet provided an effectual remedy; he associated his moral counsel with so much tenderness and pathos, and garnished it all about with such exquisite humour, that the public, like the giant drinking the wine in Homer, gaped, and cried, "More! this is divine!" If a reader has such a limited soul as to love humour only, why Burns is his man—he has more of it than any modern poet: should he covet tenderness, he cannot read far in Burns without finding it to his mind; should he desire pathos, the Scottish Peasant has it of the purest sort; and if he wish for them altogether, let him try no other Bard—for in what other poet will he find them woven more naturally into the web of song? It is by thus suiting himself to so many minds and tastes, that Burns has become such a favourite with the world; if, in a strange company, we should chance to stumble in quoting him, an English voice, or an Irish one, corrects us; much of the business of life is mingled with his verse; and the lover, whether in joy or sorrow, will find that Burns has anticipated every throb of his heart:—

"Every pulse along his veins,
And every roving fancy."

He was the first of our northern poets who brought

deep passion and high energy to the service of the muse, who added sublimity to simplicity, and found loveliness and elegance dwelling among the cottages of his native land. His simplicity is graceful as well as strong; he is never mean, never weak, never vulgar, and but seldom coarse. All he says is above the mark of other men: his language is familiar, yet dignified; careless, yet concise; and he touches on the most ordinary—nay, perilous themes, with a skill so rare and felicitous, that good fortune seems to unite with good taste in helping him through the Slough of Despond, in which so many meaner spirits have wallowed. No one has greater power in adorning the humble, and dignifying the plain—no one else has so happily picked the sweet fresh flowers of poesy from among the thorns and brambles of the ordinary paths of existence.

"The excellence of Burns," says Thomas Carlyle—a true judge, "is, indeed, among the rarest, whether in poetry or prose; but at the same time it is plain and easily recognized—his sincerity—his indisputable air of truth. Here are no fabulous woes or joys; no hollow fantastic sentimentalities; no wire-drawn refinings either in thought or feeling: the passion that is traced before us has glowed in a living heart; the opinion he utters has risen in his own understanding, and been a light to his own steps. He does not write from hearsay, but from sight and experience: it is the scenes he has lived and laboured amidst that he describes; those scenes, rude and humble as they are, have kindled beautiful emotions in his soul, noble thoughts, and definite

resolves; and he speaks forth what is in him, not from any outward call of vanity or interest, but because his heart is too full to be silent. He speaks it, too, with such melody and modulation as he can—in homely rustic jingle—but it is his own, and genuine. This is the grand secret for finding readers, and retaining them: let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself."

It must be mentioned, in abatement of this high praise, that Burns occasionally speaks with too little delicacy. He violates without necessity the true decorum of his subject, and indulges in hidden meanings and allusions, such as the most tolerant cannot applaud. Nor is this the worst: he is much too free in his treatment of matters holy. He ventures to take the Deity to task about his own passions, and the order of nature, in away less reverent than he employs when winning his way to woman's love. He has, in truth, touches of profanity which make the pious shudder. In the warmth of conversation such expressions might escape from the lips; but they should not have been coolly sanctioned in the closet with the pen. These deformities are not, however, of frequent occurrence; and, what is some extenuation, they are generally united to a noble or natural sentiment. He is not profane or indecorous for the sake of being so: his faults, as well as his beauties, come from an overflowing fulness of mind.

His songs have all the beauties, and none of the faults, of his poems. As compositions to be sung,

a finer and more scientific harmony, and a more nicely-modulated dance of words were required, and Burns had both in perfection. They flow as readily to the music as if both the air and verse had been created together, and blend and mingle like two uniting streams. The sentiments are from nature; and they never, in any instance, jar or jangle with the peculiar feeling of the music. While humming the air over during the moments of composition, the words came and took their proper places, each according to the meaning of the air: rugged expressions could not well mingle with thoughts inspired by harmony.

In his poems Burns supposes himself in the society of men, and indulges in reckless sentiments and unmeasured language: in his songs he imagines himself in softer company: when woman's eye is on him he is gentle, persuasive, and impassioned; he is never boisterous; he seeks not to say fine things, yet he never misses saying them; his compliments are uttered of free will, and all his thoughts flow naturally from the subject. There is a natural grace and fascination about his songs; all is earnest and from the heart: he is none of your millinery bards who deal in jewelled locks, laced garments, and shower pearls and gems by the bushel on youth and beauty. He makes bright eyes, flushing cheeks: the music of the tongue, and the pulses' maddening play do all. Those charms he knew came from heaven, and not out of the tire-woman's basket, and would last when fashions changed. It is remarkable that the most naturally elegant and truly impassioned songs in the language

were written by a ploughman-lad in honour of the rustic lasses around him.

If we regard the songs of Burns as so many pastoral pictures, we will find that he has an eye for the beauties of nature as accurate and as tasteful as the happiest landscape painter. Indeed, he seldom gives us a finished image of female loveliness without the accompaniment of blooming flowers, running streams, waving woods, and the melody of birds: this is the frame-work which sets off the portrait. He has recourse rarely to embellishments borrowed from art; the lighted hall and the thrilling strings are less to him than a walk with her he loves by some lonely rivulet's side, when the dews are beginning to glisten on the lilies and weigh them down, and the moon is moving not unconsciously above them. In all this we may recognize a true poet—one who felt that woman's loveliness triumphed over these fragrant accompaniments, and who regarded her still as the "blood royal of life," the brightest part of creation.

Those who desire to feel, in their full force, the songs of Burns, must not hope it from scientific singers in the theatres. The right scene is the pastoral glen; the right tongue for utterance is that of a shepherd lass; and the proper song is that which belongs to her present feelings. The gowany glen, the nibbling sheep, the warbling birds, and the running stream give the inanimate, while the singer herself personates the living, beauty of the song. I have listened to a country girl singing one of his songs, while she spread her webs to bleach

by a running stream—ignorant of her audience——with such feeling and effect as were quite overpowering. This will keep the fame of Burns high among us; should the printer's ink dry up, ten thousand melodious tongues will preserve his songs to remote generations.

The variety, too, of his lyrics is equal to their truth and beauty. He has written songs which echo the feelings of every age and condition in life. He personates all the passions of man and all the gradations of affection. He sings the lover hastening through storm and tempest to see the object of his attachment—the swelling stream, the haunted wood, and the suspicious parents are all alike disregarded. He paints him again on an eve of July, when the air is calm, the grass fragrant, and no sound is abroad save the amorous cry of the partridge, enjoying the beauty of the evening as he steals by some unfrequented way to the trysting thorn, whither his mistress is hastening; or he limns him on a cold and snowy night, enjoying a brief parley with her whom he loves, from a cautiously opened window, which shews her white arm and bright eyes, and the shadow perhaps of a more fortunate lover, which accounts for the marks of feet impressed in the snow on the way to her dwelling. Nor is he always sighing and vowing; some of his heroes answer scorn with scorn, are saucy with the saucy, and proud with the proud, and comfort themselves with sarcastic comments on woman and her fickleness and folly; others drop all allegiance to that fantastic idol beauty, and while mirth abounds, and "the wine-cup shines in light,"

find wondrous solace. He laughs at the sex one moment, and adores them the next—he ridicules and satirizes—he vows and entreats—he traduces and he deifies—all in a breath. Burns was intimate with the female heart, and with the romantic mode of courtship practised in the pastoral districts of Caledonia. He was early initiated into all the mysteries of rustic love, and had tried his eloquence with such success among the maidens of the land, that one of them said, "Open your eyes and shut your ears with Rob Burns, and there's nae fear o' your heart; but close your eyes and open your ears, and you'll lose it."

Of all lyric poets he is the most prolific and various. Of one hundred and sixty songs which he communicated to Johnson's Museum, all, save a score or so, are either his composition, or amended with such skill and genius as to be all but made his own. For Thomson he wrote little short of a hundred. He took a peculiar pleasure in ekeing out and amending the old and imperfect songs of his country. He has exercised his fancy and taste to a greater extent that way than antiquarians either like or seem willing to acknowledge. Scott, who performed for the ballads of Scotland what Burns did for many of her songs, perceived this:—"The Scottish tunes and songs," he remarked, "preserved for Burns that inexpressible charm which they have ever afforded to his countrymen. He entered into the idea of collecting their fragments with the zeal of an enthusiast; and few, whether serious or humorous, past through his hands without receiving some of those

magic touches, which, without greatly altering the song, restored its original spirit, or gave it more than it previously possessed. So dexterously are those touches combined with the ancient structure, that the *rifacciamento*, in many instances, could scarcely have been detected without the avowal of the Bard himself. Neither would it be easy to mark his share in the individual ditties. Some he appears to have entirely rewritten ; to others he added supplimentary stanzas ; in some he retained only the leading lines and the chorus ; and others he merely arranged and ornamented." No one has ever equalled him in these exquisite imitations : he caught up the peculiar spirit of the old song at once ; he thought as his elder brother in rhyme thought, and communicated an antique sentiment and tone to all the verses which he added. Finer feeling, purer fancy, more exquisite touches of nature, and more vigorous thoughts were the result of this intercourse. Burns found Scottish song like a fruit-tree in winter, not dead, though unbudded ; nor did he leave it till it was covered with bloom and beauty. He sharpened the sarcasm, deepened the passion, heightened the humour, and abated the indelicacy of his country's lyrics.

"To Burns's ear," says Wilson—a high judge in all poetic questions—"the lowly lays of Scotland were familiar, and most dear were they all to his heart. Often had he 'sung aloud old songs that are the music of the heart ;' and, some day, to be able himself to breathe such strains was his dearest, his highest ambition. His genius and his moral frame

were thus embued with the spirit of our old traditionary ballad poetry; and, as soon as all his passions were ripe, the voice of song was on all occasions of deep and tender interest—the voice of his daily, his nightly speech. Those old songs were his models; he felt as they felt, and looked up with the same eyes on the same objects. So entirely was their language his language, that all the beautiful lines, and half-lines, and single words that, because of something in them most exquisitely true to nature, had survived the rest of the compositions to which they had long ago belonged, were sometimes adopted by him, almost unconsciously it might seem, in his finest inspirations; and oftener still sounded in his ear like a key-note, on which he pitched his own plaintive tune of the heart till the voice and language of the old and new days were but as one." He never failed to surpass what he imitated; he added fruit to the tree, and fragrance to the flower. That his songs are a solace to Scottish hearts in far lands we know from many sources; the poetic testimony of an inspired witness is all we shall call for at present:—

"Encamped by Indian rivers wild,
The soldier, resting on his arms,
In Burns's carol sweet recalls
The scenes that blessed him when a child,
And glows and gladdens at the charms
Of Scotia's woods and waterfalls."

A want of chivalry has been instanced as a radical fault in the lyrics of Burns. He certainly is not of the number who approach beauty with much awe or reverence, and who raise loveliness into an idol for man to fall down and worship. The

polished courtesies and romantic affectations of high society had not found their way among the maidens of Kyle; the midnight tryste, and the stolen interview—the rapture to meet, and the anguish to part—the secret vow, and the scarce audible whisper, were dear to their bosoms; and they were unacquainted with moving in parallel lines, and breathing sighs into roses, in the affairs of the heart. To draw a magic circle of affection round those he loved, which could not be passed without lowering them from the station of angels, forms no part of the lyrical system of Burns' poetic wooing: there is no affectation in him; he speaks like one unconscious of the veneered and varnished civilities of artificial life; he feels that true love is unacquainted with fashionable distinctions, and in all he has written has thought but of the natural man and woman, and the uninfluenced emotions of the heart. Some have charged him with a want of delicacy—an accusation easily answered: he is rapturous, he is warm, he is impassioned—his heart cannot contain its ecstasies; he glows with emotion as a crystal goblet with wine; but in none of his best songs is there the least indelicacy, Love is with him a leveller; passion and feeling are of themselves as little influenced by fashion and manners as the wind is in blowing, or the sun in shining; chivalry, and even notions of delicacy, are changeable things; our daughters speak no longer with the free tongues of their great-grandmothers, and young men no longer challenge wild lions, or keep dangerous castles in honour of their ladies' eyes.

The prose of Burns has much of the original merit of his poetry; but it is seldom so pure, so natural, and so sustained. It abounds with bright bits, fine outflashings, gentle emotions, and uncommon warmth and ardour. It is very unequal; sometimes it is simple and vigorous; now and then inflated and cumbrous; and he not seldom labours to say weighty and decided things, in which a "double double toil and trouble" sort of labour is visible. "But hundreds even of his most familiar letters"—I adopt the words of Wilson—"are perfectly artless, though still most eloquent compositions. Simple we may not call them, so rich are they in fancy, so overflowing in feeling, and dashed off in every other paragraph with the easy boldness of a great master, conscious of his strength even at times when, of all things in the world, he was least solicitous about display; while some there are so solemn, so sacred, so religious, that he who can read them with an unstirred heart can have no trust, no hope, in the immortality of the soul." Those who desire to feel him in his strength must taste him in his Scottish spirit. There he spoke the language of life: in English, he spoke that of education; he had to think in the former before he could express himself in the latter. In the language in which his mother sung and nursed him he excelled; a dialect reckoned barbarous by scholars, grew classic and elevated when uttered by the tongue of ROBERT BURNS.

Of the family and fame of the Poet something should be said. Good and active friends bestirred

themselves after his death: Currie munificently wrote his life and edited his works: Robert, his eldest son, was placed in the Stamp-office by Lord Sidmouth: cadetships in India were generously obtained for William and James by Sir James Shaw, who otherwise largely befriended the family: and Lord Panmure nobly presented one hundred pounds annually to his widow, till the success of her sons in India enabled them to interpose, and take—not without remonstrance—that pious duty on themselves. The venerable Mrs. Burns lives in the house where her eminent husband died: all around her has an air of comfort, and she has been enabled to save a small sum out of her annual income: her brother, a London merchant of much respectability, has long interested himself in her affairs: and her brother-in-law, Gilbert, died lately, after having established his family successfully in the world.

The citizens of my native Dumfries feel the honour which the Poet's ashes confer on them: Mill-hole-brae has been named Burns-street: the walks are reverenced where he loved to muse; and his grave may be traced by the well-trodden pathways which pass the unnoticed tombs of the learned, the pious, the brave, and the far-descended, and lead to that of the inspired Peasant. Honours have elsewhere been liberally paid to his name: a fair monument is raised to him on the Doon: a noble statue, from the hand of Flaxman, stands in Edinburgh; and Burns-clubs celebrate his birth-day in the chief towns and cities of Britain. On the banks of the Amazons, Mississippi, St. Lawrence, Indus, and the

Ganges, his name is annually invoked and his songs sung: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Campbell have celebrated him in verse: statues are made from his chief characters; pictures painted from his vivid delineations; and even the rafters of Alloway-kirk have been formed into ornaments for the necks of ladies, and quaighs for the hands of men. Such is the influence of genius!

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